United Nations S/PV.7976

Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

7976th meeting
Monday, 19 June 2017, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Llorentty Soliz	(Bolivia (Plurinational State of))
Members:	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Egypt	Mr. Moustafa
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Italy	Mr. Lambertini
	Japan	Mr. Kawamura
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Sweden	Mr. Skau
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mrs. Carrión

Agenda

Peacebuilding and sustaining peace

Report of the Peacebuilding Commission on its tenth session (S/2017/76)

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17-17415 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Peacebuilding and sustaining peace

Report of the Peacebuilding Commission on its tenth session (S/2017/76)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Cho Tae-yul, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea and Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, and His Excellency Mr. Macharia Kamau, Permanent Representative of Kenya and former Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/76, which contains the report of the Peacebuilding Commission on its tenth session.

I now give the floor to Mr. Cho Tae-yul.

Mr. Cho Tae-yul (Republic of Korea): I would first like to congratulate Ambassador Kamau, Permanent Representative of Kenya, on the strong leadership and commitment with which he successfully chaired the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) last year, working tirelessly to lay the ground for a stronger, more effective and more relevant body. The Commission made important progress in 2016 in implementing the various resolutions adopted regarding the review of the peacebuilding architecture. This year we are building on those achievements as the PBC continues to promote an integrated, strategic and coherent approach to peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

In response to the Security Council's January presidential statement (S/PRST/2017/2) emphasizing the importance of the PBC's role in convening peacebuilding efforts, the Commission has been making an effort to use its convening role, in collaboration with the United Nations Office in West Africa and the Sahel, to mobilize a greater commitment and partnership between the United Nations, the countries of the Sahel and other international and regional partners with a view to advancing the implementation of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel. On 6 March, I convened a PBC meeting in which we were briefed by Mr. Pierre Buyoya, former President of Burundi and African Union High Representative for Mali and the Sahel; Mr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel; Mr. Najim Elhadj Mohamed, Permanent Secretary of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel); and Mr. Angel Losada, European Union Special Representative for the Sahel. Representatives of the countries of the G-5 Sahel also participated in the meeting. In addition, in my capacity as Chair of the PBC, together with the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding, I also attended last week's meeting of the Ministerial Coordination Platform for the Sahel in N'Djamena. The meeting enabled me to identify opportunities for the PBC to support, on request, the efforts of the countries of the Sahel to achieve development and stability. I look forward to discussing that in more detail at the informal interactive dialogue to be held later this morning.

The resolutions that I just mentioned called for the PBC to consider reviewing its working methods so as to enhance efficiency and flexibility in support of peacebuilding and sustaining peace. In that regard, in accordance with its mandate and upon request from the relevant States, the Commission continues its consideration of country- and region-specific situations.

At the request of the Gambian Government, the Commission convened a meeting to discuss the peacebuilding priorities of The Gambia, following my visit to the country last March. The meeting was preceded by developments on the ground and important regional initiatives in support of the political situation in The Gambia, strongly supported by the Secretary-General. At the PBC meeting, the Permanent Representative of The Gambia provided a direct account from the perspective of the Government, while the Commission provided a platform to discuss international and regional support.

On 7 June, the PBC also convened a meeting on the situation of the Solomon Islands, upon the request of its Prime Minister, who presented the key peacebuilding challenges facing his country at this crucial time, as the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands is expected to withdraw from the country this month.

The Commission not only benefited from the direct engagement by the Prime Minister, but also heard from

a representative of the Young Women's Parliamentary Group and key regional partners of the Solomon Islands, including the members of the Pacific Islands Forum and the Chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. It was an excellent opportunity for the Commission to demonstrate its unique value as a partnership forum for countries to engage with the international community in connection with challenges involved in peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

However, a number of priorities remained for the Commission during its eleventh session, upon which I will elaborate briefly.

First, concerning the matter of partnerships, partnerships and cooperation with relevant stakeholders, both within and outside the United Nations, are crucial. The Commission should examine all available opportunities so as to strengthen its collaboration with international financial institutions, including the World Bank and the African Development Bank, as well as with regional and subregional organizations, such as the African Union (AU). Earlier this month, together with the group of ambassadors from the PBC, I met with the President of the World Bank in Washington D.C., a number of executive directors and several other senior officials. We discussed ways to strengthen the partnership between the PBC and the Bank in support of conflict-affected countries that are on the agenda of both the United Nations and the World Bank. That discussion will continue at the PBC's annual session on 30 June on the partnership for financing for peacebuilding, at which Kristalina Georgieva, Chief Executive Officer of the World Bank Group, has agreed to attend along with Secretary-General António Guterres.

In connection with the African Union, I intend to follow up on the work of my predecessor and visit AU headquarters during the latter part of this year so as to strengthen collaboration with the African Union, especially its Peace and Security Council.

Within the United Nations, as well, we need to further explore ways to improve the quality of the advice that we provide to the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council. In recent months, the Security Council called on the PBC to advise on a number of regional and country-specific issues, including the Sahel region, the Central African Republic, Liberia and Guinea-Bissau. Those are opportunities for the Commission to prove that, through its convening role, it can provide solid and comprehensive advice upon request from the principal organs of the United Nations.

In line with the aforementioned presidential statement on the Sahel, the PBC intends to propose a joint meeting with the Economic and Social Council on the Sahel region on 28 June to look at ways to address the development challenges in the region, the outcome of which we will be ready to report to the Security Council upon request.

Secondly, with regard to coherence, the resolutions on the review of the peacebuilding architecture recognize the importance for the Commission to promote an integrated, strategic and coherent approach to peacebuilding and bring sustained international attention to sustaining peace. During the past several years, the PBC has demonstrated that, by bringing together various parts of the United Nations system in one forum, it can induce better integrated and coherent work in the countries concerned. Through discussing country-specific and regional peacebuilding issues with senior representatives of related departments, the PBC has an opportunity to reinforce that message and enhance the United Nations coherent approach to peacebuilding and sustaining peace. I am committed to use the remainder of the current session to work in that direction so as to engage relevant United Nations actors and explore ways to work better together.

Thirdly, concerning the issue of gender, in 2016, the Commission adopted its gender strategy, which is now being integrated into the work of the PBC. The Commission will continue to build on past achievements to promote the gender dimension of peacebuilding and provide opportunities for the increased participation of women in peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

Fourthly, and finally, with regard to transparency, efficiency and flexibility, the Commission will continue to consider ways to respond in a rapid and effective manner to requests for advice and support, including through newly established focal points on gender, youth, institution-building, financing and national ownership.

The PBC is an intergovernmental advisory body to the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council. Its relevance depends upon its capacity to provide the kind of advice that can enrich the deliberations of its parent bodies. The PBC remains committed to providing that kind of advice by fully utilizing its convening role and diverse membership, while recognizing that peace, development

and human rights are closely linked and mutually reinforcing. We Stand ready to respond to requests to contribute to building and searching for peace.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Cho Tae-yul for the information that he has provided to the Council.

I now give the floor to Ambassador Kamau.

Mr. Kamau (Kenya): I am pleased to be here today to present the annual report (S/2017/76) of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) on its tenth session. I congratulate you, Sir, for your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council, and commend you for the manner in which you have conducted its affairs.

I should like to commend the representative of the Republic of Korea, as Chair of the PBC at its eleventh session, for his leadership, and all the PBC members, including members of the Council, for their continued commitment to the work of the Commission. I also wish to thank you, Mr. President, for your decision, to convene the annual informal interactive dialogue between members of the Security Council and the PBC immediately after this briefing this morning. We look forward to that informal exchange as an opportunity to further enhance the advisory role of the Commission to the Council.

I will now turn to the presentation of the Commission's annual report on its tenth session. The year 2016 was an important one for the Peacebuilding Commission, marked by the adoption of the resolutions on the review of the peacebuilding architecture and several activities that the Commission undertook to implement those resolutions. In April 2016, the General Assembly and the Security Council not only reaffirmed the relevance of the Peacebuilding Commission as an intergovernmental advisory body, but also stressed the Commission's importance in promoting an integrated, strategic and coherent approach to peacebuilding and bringing sustained international attention to sustaining peace, thereby serving as a bridge among the principal organs and a platform to bring together United Nations States Members and a broad range of partners who are interested in peacebuilding. I should like to direct the attention of the Security Council to the following points.

First, during the period covered by the report, the Commission diversified its engagement and expressed its ability to be flexible in response to requests by Member States. It convened a range of country-specific, regional and thematic discussions. The Commission's consideration of peacebuilding opportunities and challenges after the outbreak of the Ebola epidemic in West Africa was well informed by a visit by the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission to the region, which explored the subregional peacebuilding opportunities and challenges. Throughout that time, the Commission provided an important platform to address requests of Member States to discuss cross-border and subregional challenges and, at the same time, to improve coherence among various stakeholders. The Commission also benefited from expert briefings from the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the United Nations Development Programme, thereby providing evidence of a further step forward in the Commission's efforts to enhance a coherent approach to peacebuilding across the system.

Secondly, the value of the Peacebuilding Commission lies in its ability to fully utilize its diverse membership to reinforce its bridging role among the principal organs and entities of the United Nations. We all agree that development, peace and security, and human rights are interlinked and mutually reinforcing, while acknowledging that development itself cannot guarantee peace, like peace alone cannot guarantee sustainable development. That is why we worked with the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council to discusss possible synergies among peacebuilding, sustaining peace and sustainable development. When requested, we provided advice to the Security Council in a holistic manner — for example, in the case of Liberia and Guinea-Bissau

Thirdly, throughout the tenth session, the Commission also made important progress in building stronger relations with key partners, including international financial institutions, regional and subregional organizations and other bodies within the United Nations system. The Chair engaged the African Union Peace and Security Council on issues of mutual interest and potential areas of future cooperation with the Commission, as required in the twin resolutions — General Assembly resolutions 70/262 and Security Council resolution 2282 (2016). I urge the Commission to continue in that direction and to look for opportunities to strengthen its collaboration with Member States, civil society organizations and, where relevant, private sector actors.

Fourthly, peacebuilding efforts require predictable and sustained resources. In that connection, in 2016,

the Commission continued its efforts to strengthen the synergies with the Peacebuilding Fund. During the tenth session, we had several opportunities to build those synergies. The meeting on financing for peacebuilding in Kyrgyzstan, in October 2016, is only one example of how the Commission can provide a platform to the Peacebuilding Fund recipient countries to discuss the impact of the Fund in support of national peacebuilding efforts. I hope that Kyrgyzstan will be followed by other countries in actively seeking engagement with the Peacebuilding Fund as a platform to share their peacebuilding experiences and success stories.

Fifthly, the General Assembly and the Security Council encouraged the Peacebuilding Commission to consider diversifying its working methods to enhance its efficiency and flexibility. Following the adoption of the resolutions of April 2016, the Commission conducted a review of its rules of procedure and working methods with a view to, inter alia, examining possible forms of engagement by the Commission and enhancing its advisory role, including by aligning its work to relevant Security Council meetings.

Beyond those five points, there is a lot more that the Commission did in 2016 to support peacebuilding and sustaining peace, including through its country-specific activities, as indicated in the annual report (S/2017/76). I am confident that, under the capable chairpersonship of the Republic of Korea, the Peacebuilding Commission will continue to evolve into an even more dynamic and important platform for the membership to engage on challenges and opportunities for building and sustaining peace.

In conclusion, allow me to thank Assistant Secretary-General Fernandez-Taranco and his entire team at the Peacebuilding Support Office for their support throughout the tenth session and their dedication to peacebuilding and sustaining peace. I would also like to wish my Ambassador Cho Tae-yul every success as Chair in 2017.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Kamau for his briefing and for the work he has carried out.

I shall now give the floor to the members of the Security Council who wish to make statements.

Mrs. Carrión (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): First and foremost, Uruguay would like to express its solidarity with the Governments of Colombia, Mali and the United Kingdom in the light of the attacks that have taken place in those countries recently. We extend our deepest condolences to the relatives of the victims.

I thank the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, Ambassador Cho Tae-yul, and the former Vice-Chair and former Chair of the Commission, Ambassador Macharia Kamau, for their informative briefings and the work they do in leading the Peacebuilding Commission.

Since the Security Council and the General Assembly adopted substantially identical resolutions on peacebuilding — resolution 2282 (2016) and resolution 70/262, respectively — the Peacebuilding Commission has been revitalized and has made progress in implementing its goals and considering many situations that go beyond those within the purview of the country-specific configurations.

In January, the Security Council acknowledged the cooperation between the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel and the Peacebuilding Commission and underscored the importance of the work of the Commission in consolidating peace in West Africa and in encouraging deeper commitment and strengthening partnership among the countries of the Sahel and other partners in order to promote the implementation and adaptation of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel.

The conflicts that have been witnessed in the Sahel countries and in the Lake Chad basin are exacerbated by a number of contributing factors, such as the spread of the terrorist threat, the scarcity of State authority, the humanitarian and food crises, and the effects of change climate, among others. Against that backdrop, we pay tribute to national, regional and international efforts aimed at relieving the situation and providing financing to the Sahel region and the Lake Chad basin. Both the Multinational Joint Task Force in the Lake Chad basin and the initiative to establish the Group of Five for the Sahel are clear examples of coordinated regional efforts that have played key roles in responding to situations of this nature, which have transboundary elements and affect entire regions.

We believe that the work of the Peacebuilding Commission lends a holistic and comprehensive vision to the challenges presented by both regions. The Peacebuilding Commission, as a coordinator of all efforts under way, will undoubtedly strengthen the cooperation of all parties, including that among the bodies and agencies of the United Nations; regional and

subregional organizations, such as the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States; as well as cooperation among international financial institutions and donor countries. Such coordination is vital if we are to approach these situations in a comprehensive and inclusive way that addresses peacekeeping and security concerns, humanitarian assistance and development cooperation. In that connection, Uruguay believes that closer contact and interaction between the Peacebuilding Commission and the Security Council is a priority. To that end, we underscore the usefulness of interactive meetings, such as the one scheduled today, and the need for more frequent contact between both bodies.

In conclusion, I would like to congratulate the Peacebuilding Commission for including a gender perspective in its work, as it is clear that women are key actors in both preventing and resolving conflicts and they have a key role to play in the recovery of societies and in the processes of building sustainable peace.

The meeting rose at 10.30 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.7977

Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

7977th meeting
Tuesday, 20 June 2017, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Llorentty Soliz	(Bolivia (Plurinational State of))
Members:	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Italy	Mr. Cardi
	Japan	Mr. Kawamura
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Sweden	Mr. Skau
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Wilson
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting. Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General; His excellency Mr. Ahmed Aboul-Gheit, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States; Mr. Michael Doran, Senior Fellow at the Hudson Institute; and His Excellency Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, member of The Elders.

Mr. Mladenov is joining today's meeting via video teleconference from Jerusalem.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give Mr. Mladenov the floor.

Mr. Mladenov: Today I devote my regular briefing to the Security Council to reporting, on behalf of the Secretary-General, on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) during the period from 25 March to 19 June. I will focus on developments on the ground in accordance with the provisions of the resolution, including on regional and international efforts to advance peace.

Let me once again note that nothing in the report can be divorced from the broader context in which it is occurring — the half century of occupation, the stalled peace process, the lack of dialogue between the parties, as well as the continued illegal settlement activities, terror, violence and increased radicalization.

Allow me to note that this month's briefing coincides with the fiftieth anniversary of the Arab-Israeli war, which resulted in Israel's occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Gaza and the Syrian Golan. Achieving a negotiated two-State outcome is the only way to lay the foundations for enduring peace that is based on Israeli security needs and the Palestinian right to sovereignty and statehood. Now is not the time to give up on that goal. Now is the time to create the conditions for a return to negotiations so as to resolve all final-status issues based on the relevant United Nations resolutions, mutual agreements and international law.

Resolution 2334 (2016), in paragraph 2, calls on Israel to take steps to

> "cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem".

No such steps were taken during the reporting period. In fact, since 24 March there has been a substantial increase in settlement-related announcements as compared with the previous reporting period, with plans for nearly 4,000 housing units moving forward and 2,000 tenders issued. The United Nations considers all settlement activities to be illegal under international law. Resolution 2334 (2016) states that the international community will not recognize any changes to the 4 June 1967 lines, including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed to by the parties themselves through negotiations.

Plans for approximately 3,200 units were advanced through the various stages of the planning process in 22 settlements in Area C of the occupied West Bank. Those plans include 2,000 housing units in the major population centres of Ma'ale Adumim and Ariel, and over 800 units in Kerem Reim, Oranit and Beit El. One hundred units were advanced for the new settlement of Amihai, established in the eastern Shiloh Valley for the former residents of the Amona outpost, where the Israeli authorities also declared 241 acres as State land in the same zone. Both acts would further sever the territorial contiguity of a future Palestinian State, thereby solidifying a line of settlements dividing the northern and central West Bank. As construction on the new settlement began today, the Prime Minister stated that

> "There will never be a Government that is more pro-settlement than our Government".

Separately, tenders were issued for close to 2,000 housing units in four settlements close to the 1967 line — Alfei Menashe, Beitar Illit, Beit Arie and Kamer Shomron. Infrastructure tenders for the future construction of more than 200 settlement units in Kochav Yaakov, located between Ramallah and Jerusalem, were also re-issued. In East Jerusalem 770 housing units in the Gilo southern slopes reached the final approval stage, and building permits for more

than 360 housing units were granted in Ramat Shlomo, Pisgat Ze'ev and Ramot.

Meanwhile, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the reporting period witnessed a sharp decline in the number of demolished Palestinian-owned structures in Area C. Twenty-nine structures were demolished or seized — down from 149 in the previous reporting period. East Jerusalem saw a less pronounced decrease in demolished structures, from 49 to 32. However, the monthly average of demolitions in East Jerusalem since the beginning of 2017 remains at the same level as in 2016, when demolitions reached a 15-year record.

Allow me to turn to the problem of violence, which remains a hallmark of the conflict. Resolution 2334 (2016) calls on all sides to refrain from such acts and undertake efforts to combat them. During the reporting period, the security situation on the ground remained relatively calm. No rockets were fired from Gaza towards Israel, and the Israeli Defence Forces did not conduct any air strikes in Gaza.

However, according to OCHA, 17 Palestinians were killed by Israeli security forces in various incidents, including reported terror attacks, clashes and military operations. One Israeli soldier was killed in a car-ramming attack on 6 April outside the Ofra settlement, to the north-east of Ramallah, and, on 16 June a policewoman was killed in a shooting and stabbing attack by Palestinian assailants in the vicinity of the Old City of Jerusalem. On 14 April, a British exchange student was killed by a Palestinian assailant in a stabbing attack in Jerusalem.

The Israeli security forces killed a Jordanian citizen reportedly involved in a stabbing incident in the Old City on 13 May, and a Palestinian fisherman off the coast of Gaza on 25 May. The reporting period also witnessed the shooting of two Palestinian men during protests at the fence along Gaza's northern border.

On 24 March, a senior Hamas military commander was assassinated by unknown assailants in Gaza City. That was followed by a lockdown of Gaza by Hamas in which the de facto authorities did not allow Palestinians or internationals to leave the Strip for several days. In April, Hamas executed six Palestinian men for alleged collaboration with Israel — an act that was condemned by the international community.

Settler-related violence continued during the reporting period, as well. According to OCHA, 31 incidents were documented, resulting in one Palestinian killed, 10 injured and damage to Palestinian property. Much of the violence has centred around the West Bank settlement of Yitzhar near Nablus — a recurrent source of violent actions against neighbouring villages in the past. Against the backdrop of Israeli security officials reportedly warning of the increased risk of another terror attack by Jewish extremists, like the one against the Dawabsheh family two years ago, a Rabbi from Yitzhar was indicted for incitement to violence against Palestinians, while a number of others were arrested.

In paragraph 7 of resolution 2334 (2016), the Council called on both parties

> "to refrain from provocative actions, incitement and inflammatory rhetoric"

and, in paragraph 6,

> "to clearly condemn all acts of terrorism".

Regrettably, such calls continued to go unanswered during the reporting period. Palestinian officials and media outlets affiliated with Fatah continued to commemorate the lives of perpetrators of past terror attacks against Israeli civilians. One community centre was recently named after a Palestinian woman who was involved in an attack in which 38 Israelis, including 13 children, were killed in Tel Aviv in 1978. UN-Women and Norway withdrew support from the organization.

Hamas leaders have also continued their deplorable practice of celebrating recent attacks against Israeli civilians as heroic, including the 1 April stabbing in Jerusalem's Old City in which two civilians were injured, and only a few hours following the complex attack at Damascus Gate last Friday, in which a policewoman was killed, Hamas was quick to praise "the three martyrs from today's heroic Jerusalem operation".

Some Israeli officials have also employed provocative rhetoric. Politicians have repeatedly declared that there will never be a Palestinian State, while pledging to take the idea of statehood "off the agenda". In a regrettable incident, an Israeli Minister spoke at an event attended by other members of the Knesset, celebrating the publication of a book promoting abhorrent views concerning Israel's Arab citizens. The book was condemned by the Anti-Defamation League

as dangerous and inhumane, and a number of the participants expressed regret at their attendance.

Resolution 2334 (2016) reiterated the call by the Middle East Quartet on both parties to take affirmative steps to reverse negative trends on the ground that are imperilling the two-State solution. In May, Israel approved a number of positive measures to improve the Palestinian economy. Those included the 24-hour opening of the Allenby Bridge for a three-month period effective as of today, as well as extended operating hours at the Tarkumiya, Ephraim, Gilboa, Maccabim and Reihan crossing points and the construction of a vehicular crossing point at Eyal. Furthermore, the package envisions the development of an industrial zone that includes bonded warehouses and a natural gas and fuel terminal aimed, at enhancing Palestinian authority over trade and customs issues.

The measures also included the demarcation of approximately 4,000 acres of land in Area C, including next to three major Palestinian cities — Ramallah, Nablus and Tulkarem — in which the regulation of planning and zoning will undergo changes with potentially positive implications for Palestinian development.

The Palestinian and Israeli Finance Ministries held a number of meetings to discuss fiscal leakages, which is a critical issue given the Palestinian Authority's $800 million-financing gap. The parties have progressed in discussions on value-added tax clearance revenues. In early June, in accordance with the electricity agreement signed in September, Israel transferred $30 million to the Palestinian Authority in lieu of equalization levies and health stamps, and agreed to conduct monthly transfers in the future. In May, the Joint Water Committee held its first meeting in seven years.

During the reporting period, the situation in Gaza heightened intra-Palestinian tensions, thereby creating an increasingly dangerous humanitarian situation and raising serious concerns about the prospects of another conflict. By establishing an administrative committee to run civilian affairs, Hamas tightened its control of Gaza and further antagonized the legitimate Palestinian authorities, reducing the prospects for reconciliation. Meanwhile, a stand-off between Fatah and Hamas over the payment of taxes on fuel led to the shut down of the only power plant in Gaza, leaving residents with four hours of electricity per day. Basic services, including health facilities, water supply and wastewater management have almost ground to a halt, increasing the risk of health and environmental disasters. Today Gaza depends exclusively on Israeli electricity lines, which normally provide 60 per cent of supply, on Egypt and on a United Nations-managed emergency fuel operation that, given the funding available, will expire in two to three months.

On 15 May, the Palestinian Authority informed Israel that it would reduce its payment for the electricity supplied to Gaza by 30 per cent. One month later, Israel agreed to the Palestinian request. An initial 5 per cent reduction was implemented on 19 June, and further cuts are expected to have catastrophic consequences for Gaza's population.

Going beyond the scope of today's report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), once again, I would like to warn all parties that Gaza is a tinderbox. If and when it explodes, it will have devastating consequences for the population and derail all efforts at advancing peace. Two million Palestinians in Gaza can no longer be held hostage by divisions. They have lived under the control of Hamas for a decade. They have had to deal with crippling Israeli closures, Palestinian divisions and have lived through three devastating conflicts. Perpetuating that situation breeds radicalism and extremism. We have a collective responsibility to prevent that situation; we have a duty to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe.

Returning to resolution 2334 (2016), during the reporting period there were no developments related to Member States' distinguishing, in their relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied in 1967. There were, however, continuing efforts by the international community to advance peace.

On 29 March in Jordan, at the Summit of the League of Arab States, Arab leaders committed to relaunching serious peace negotiations on the basis of a two-State solution, establishing a Palestinian State "on the lines of June 4, 1967 with its capital in East Jerusalem" and reaffirmed their commitment to the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative. In May, on his first trip abroad, United States President Trump visited Israeli and Palestinian leaders and made clear that resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is critical to combating the threat of violent extremism and terrorism. He expressed his personal commitment to helping both sides achieve a peace agreement that would begin the process of peace

throughout the region. The Secretary-General looks forward to working with the United States, Russia, the European Union and regional partners towards improving the environment for peacemaking, including by engaging with all sides to improve the Palestinian economy in the West Bank and Gaza.

In conclusion, I would like to share some broad observations on the reporting period.

First, once again, I must stress the urgency of addressing the rapidly deteriorating situation in Gaza. We must acknowledge the significant budget constraints the Palestinian Authority is currently facing and the need to support the Government in addressing them. However, all decisions must be taken with due consideration of their humanitarian impact. I therefore call on Palestinian leaders to urgently reach the necessary compromises that will return Gaza to the control of the legitimate Palestinian authorities. Last month, I warned the Security Council that the crisis was leading us towards another conflict — a conflict that no one wants. I urge all parties to act before it is too late.

Secondly, the policy of continued illegal settlement construction in the occupied Palestinian territory contravenes resolution 2334 (2016). The large number of settlement-related activities documented during the reporting period undermine the chances for the establishment of a viable, contiguous Palestinian State as part of a two-State solution.

Thirdly, the continuing terror attacks, violence and incitement remain a very serious concern to all. Leaders have a responsibility to implement measures demonstrating their commitment to combating violence and any acts of provocation and inflammatory rhetoric.

Fourthly, while Israeli initiatives to improve the Palestinian economy are positive steps forward, it remains to be seen whether or not they will significantly increase Palestinian civil authority, in line with Quartet recommendations and prior commitments between the parties.

In this symbolic month, it is time to turn the challenges of the past into opportunities for the future. As the Secretary-General recently stated,

> "The occupation has shaped the lives of both Palestinians and Israelis. It has fuelled recurring cycles of violence and retribution. Its perpetuation is sending an unmistakable message to generations of Palestinians that their dream of statehood is destined to remain just that, a dream; and to Israelis that their desire for peace, security and regional recognition remains unattainable".

Every day that passes without peace is another day we neglect our collective responsibility to advance a meaningful strategy towards a negotiated two-State solution that meets the national and historic aspirations of both peoples. The United Nations will continue its determined engagement with the parties and all key stakeholders to achieve that objective.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

I now give the floor the Mr. Aboul-Gheit.

Mr. Aboul-Gheit (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to begin by thanking you, Mr. President, and members of the Security Council for holding today's debate and for inviting me, as representative of the League of Arab States, to participate in the debate.

The truth is that I am deeply saddened as I speak before the Council today, exactly 50 years since the start of the Israeli occupation of Arab and Palestinian lands in June 1967. I was a young Egyptian diplomat at the time, and in those 50 years, I have held many positions of responsibility. Unfortunately, the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories continues without the occupying Power showing any genuine attempt at reaching an acceptable settlement that would end the conflict once and for all.

We note the number of lives and opportunities that have been lost, and the wounds that have worsened in the past 50 years. We are left only to wonder about the negative effects that the conflict has had on Arab societies — how it has depleted our energy and increased our problems, exhausted our ability to develop and caused volcanoes of anger to erupt inside so many of our Palestinian and Arab young people. That anger is then expressed in several ways — some of them so vile that they strip people of their humanity.

The Arab side was defeated in June 1967 by Israeli aggression against its lands and it continues to pay the price even now. Despite the fact that the 1973 war, which I also witnessed, ccreated a new landscape and military situation, Israelis continued to use any pretext to maintain control of Palestinian territories — that is in fact at the heart of the conflict. It has made a fair and permanent settlement extremely difficult. The

Palestinian people in particular find themselves in an extremely complicated situation. Unfortunately, after the occupation of the remaining 22 per cent of Palestinian territory under the British Mandate, they have no space that they can call their own independent State. It is an extraordinary situation that is unparalleled in modern history, but yet it has continued for half a century. Unfortunately, some Israelis continue to believe that this situation can continue for years and decades into the future.

A few months after the military operations in 1967, the Council adopted resolution 242 (1967), which rejects the occupation of the territories of others by force, as per the Charter of the United Nations. The resolution also created the basis for any acceptable settlement of this conflict, that is, the complete withdrawal by Israel from the occupied territories in return for normal, peaceful relations with Israel. That approach remains the only means to address the Palestinian issue. This logic is, in fact, what the Arab States adopted at the Summit of the League of Arab States in Beirut in 2002, in the form of the Arab Peace Initiative, which calls for the complete withdrawal by Israel and the settlement of all pending issues in return for complete and peaceful relations. That equation seems easy, acceptable and fair to everyone. It was supported by the entire international community, with the exception of Israel. To date, we have not heard of a single Israeli politician or official who has accepted the Initiative.

It is unfortunate that in return Israel presents only one alternative: continued occupation. We, in practice, have two modes of life, subjected to the authority of the Israeli State. In that alternative there is no Palestinian sovereignty over any territory. In that alternative the Palestinian Government is more like a municipal Government that manages the affairs of citizens under Israeli sovereignty. Unfortunately, Israel has buried the hope generated by the 1993 Oslo Accords. That hope has practically died, affirming the bitter reality in the West Bank and the open prison that is the Gaza Strip.

This painful reality is taking place before the eyes and ears of the world year after year. Despite how painful this reality is for the Palestinians, who are losing their lives and their time in checkpoints and behind the separation wall, this represents a complete condemnation of the international order, of which the Council is a great expression. We must all accept and admit that this system has failed after 50 years of occupation. It has failed to end this conflict, and I cannot deny that deep disappointment is overcoming the Palestinians due to the failure of the international system to support them and transform their dreams and aspirations into reality.

The peace treaties signed between Israel, on one side, with Egypt and with Jordan, on the other, represent hope and show us that peace is not impossible. These are beacons of light in the long dark tunnel of conflict and violence. There is no doubt that they have stood the test of time; and the fact that the parties to those treaties have held onto them show that they were based on a solid foundation.

Today, after countless rounds of secret and public negotiations, after sincere efforts from all parties to arrive at a fair settlement, and after numerous interim agreements, as well as detailed agreements signed during different rounds of negotiations that I have personally witnessed, after this long history of failure to end the conflict, I say that we must be honest with ourselves. All those plans and attempts did not succeed because they did not address the heart of the conflict. They have been concerned with creating interim settlements and arrangements that do not address the heart of the matter. Practically, this has only led to prolonged conflict.

The heart of the matter is the occupation of territories in 1967. No solution will be achieved without directly and decisively addressing this matter, based on the principle of land in return for peace. Any negotiations not based on this assumption will be doomed to fail.

Our long experience in addressing this complicated conflict drives us to speak honestly about previous failures and how we must not repeat them. We must immediately address the final settlement issue. I reiterate that the goal must be to address the details of a final settlement — which is the heart of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict — most important of which are the borders, Jerusalem, security and refugees. In that regard, I would like to present to the Council the following points.

First, the relevant parties are, in general, unable to manage successful negotiations alone, without consistent and strong international support. If the two parties, the Israelis and the Palestinians, were to be left without international support, they would most likely be unable to achieve any settlement or agreement, particularly in light of the grave imbalance of power between the two parties. In that regard, I would like to

pay tribute to every State that has attempted throughout the history of this conflict to bring the viewpoints of the parties closer together. In particular I wish to mention the United States of America, the successive Governments of which have performed different roles that are significant. I hope that this positive engagement with the parties will continue in a balanced manner in order to achieve the desired settlement.

Secondly, any serious negotiation must have an agreed framework of reference. Without that, the negotiations will not succeed. That framework includes Council and General Assembly resolutions, the principle of land in return for peace, and the Arab Peace Initiative. That framework of reference must govern any negotiation process so that we do not engage in any random attempts or negotiations that go round in a vicious circle while achieving nothing.

Thirdly, the current Israeli Government is adopting a strategy that will render impossible the two-State solution. That Government is following a systematic plan of building settlements, choosing the locations of those settlements in a way that makes a viable Palestinian State of connected territories almost geographically impossible. We heard our friend Mr. Mladenov speak on this minutes ago. We may have heard the statement made by the Israeli Minister of Defence a few days ago in which he boasted that the number of building permits issued since the beginning of this year in the Jewish settlements in the West Bank and in East Jerusalem was the highest since 1992. This year alone the Israeli Government has approved 8,354 new residential units, 3,066 of which, an unprecedented number, are slated for immediate construction. In 1967, there were 12,000 settlers; in 1996, 150,000; and today there are 400,000, in addition to another 200,000 in East Jerusalem.

This situation leaves no doubt as to the fact that the plan of and the approach adopted by the current Israeli leadership is a plan for settlement, not a plan for peace. Resolution 2334 (2016), of December 2016, which was adopted with unprecedented unanimity following a long-standing failure to address the conflict, was a step in the right direction on the path towards delegitimizing the Israeli settlements by bringing increased pressure to bear on Israel to change course. Other resolutions must follow suit, particularly in terms of requesting that the Secretary-General submit a report on its implementation every three months.

Fourthly, the Arab Peace Initiative offers Israel a historic opportunity to normalize relations not only with its Arab neighbours but also with Muslim nations. The Amman summit of 29 March 2017 reaffirmed this initiative as a strategic Arab choice. However, I am compelled here to reaffirm the position of the Arab Summit: that Israel cannot reap the benefits of peace before achieving peace.

Fifthly, Arab States have noted of late continuing efforts on the part of Israel, which remains, under all norms of international law, an occupying Power, to normalize its situation in the United Nations and its specialized agencies. Most significant in this respect are Israel's efforts to become a member of the Security Council in 2019-2020. Israel is in consistent violation of the Charter of the United Nations and international law, and, accordingly, it fails to meet the minimum conditions required to become a member of the Council. Accepting Israel as a member thereof would strike at the heart of the Council's credibility and give impetus to Israeli extremists and settlers. If Israel can normalize its international status so easily, what will induce it to engage in serious negotiations aimed at ending the conflict?

It is bewildering, really, that Israel can find the courage to submit its candidature for membership in the Council. It never misses an opportunity to weaken the credibility of the United Nations. We may have heard that a few days ago the Israeli Prime Minister called for the dismantling of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, accusing it of working against Israel. This is no surprise, because the Agency represents an international commitment to refugees. The Israeli Government is trying to bury this issue completely and erase it from the international agenda.

Sixthly, addressing the issues of the border, security, Jerusalem and refugees is the basis for an acceptable and lasting solution, but the current Israeli Government continues to excel at framing the most complicated issues as though it were trying to kill all prospects for peace, for example requiring the Palestinian side to accept what is called a Jewish Israeli State and providing a minimum level of security guarantees. It is absurd, really, for a Government whose members do not accept the Palestinian right to an independent State to require that the Palestinians accept its State as a condition for negotiations.

It is painful to recall that 50 years have passed since the occupation of the Arab territories. It is time to end the nightmare of occupation, which is the underlying cause of the increase in violence, radicalization and terrorism throughout our region. I have said for many years that violence and terrorism are the direct result of our failure to resolve the Palestinian issue.

The world needs us to arrive at a just and lasting solution to the conflict, in order to pave the way for peace and development and enable the Palestinians to regain their rights. The Security Council must uphold its responsibilities in this regard. I hope that it will be able to restore confidence and hope to the Palestinians and show them that the world will not abandon them and that they will not become forgotten statistics.

The Arab League is fully ready to work with the Council to achieve the long-desired peace.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Aboul-Gheit for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Doran.

Mr. Doran: It is an honour to appear before the Council today to discuss the fiftieth anniversary of the 1967 war and the current state of Arab-Israeli peacemaking.

Permit me to focus my remarks on the key factors that prompted Israel to take control of the West Bank in 1967, and to discuss the continued significance of those factors today.

The 1967 crisis began with a lie. In May of that year, the Soviet Union falsely accused Israel of massing troops on the Syrian border. That lie gave Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser a pretext to overturn the status quo in Egyptian-Israeli relations. Reacting to the Soviets' false claim and recognizing that it was a green light from Moscow to heat up the Arab-Israeli conflict, Nasser demanded the immediate departure of the United Nations Emergency Force from the Sinai Peninsula. He quickly massed the Egyptian military in the Sinai, closed the straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping and organized an anti-Israel coalition with Jordan and Syria.

Nasser knew full well that Israel would regard these steps as a casus belli. Indeed, his propaganda machine boasted that Egypt had given Israel no choice but to attack, and that, moreover, the destruction of the Jewish State was imminent, a theme that leaders around the Arab world, including the Palestine Liberation Organization, loudly echoed. Israel responded to this threat with a set of lightning attacks against Egypt, which prompted King Hussein of Jordan to open fire on Israel, a fateful decision that ended with the West Bank in Israel's hands. Make no mistake, however: from beginning to end, this was Nasser's war.

For all that the world has changed, Israel today still faces adversaries that operate according to the Nasserist playbook. The greatest of those adversaries is Iran, which has created an anti-status-quo coalition made up of itself, Syria, and their proxies, Hizbullah, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas, among others. Like Nasser's Egypt, Iran aspires to be the leading Power in the Middle East, a goal that it pursues in multiple theatres simultaneously, including the Arab-Israeli arena, where it openly advocates the destruction of Israel.

The Security Council should indeed work to advance Israeli-Palestinian relations, but, in doing so, it must avoid policies that work to the advantage of Iran and its proxies, or that allow the Palestinians to duck direct negotiations. In recent years, three prevailing fallacies have prevented the United Nations from fashioning policies that meet these needs.

The first of is the idea that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is the core of the larger Arab-Israeli conflict and, moreover, a centre of gravity in regional politics. If Palestinian-Israeli relations were truly so influential, then we would expect the relations between Israel and the Arab States to fluctuate in accordance with changes in Palestinian-Israeli relations. Such a pattern is not, and never has been, discernable. While Jordan and Egypt have both found it wise to make peace with Israel, Syria has refused. No knowledgeable observer would ever suggest that it was the Palestinian factor that prompted Syria to reject peace. If Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas were to sign a peace agreement tomorrow, neither Syria — nor Iran, for that matter — would honour it.

This point is so self-evident that it hardly seems worth noting, yet in its discussions of regional peace and security the United Nations routinely accords Palestinian-Israeli relations a special status that hardly seems justified on the basis of objective observation. At the same time, it has paid comparatively little attention to, for example, Iran's arming, training and

equipping of Hizbullah in contravention of Security Council resolutions.

Iran, the Al-Assad regime and Hizbullah have exploited the fixation of the international community on Israel to deflect attention from their wider regional aspirations — aspirations that they are pursuing with particularly murderous consequences in Syria today. More people have died in Syria at their hands in the last six years than have died on both sides in the Arab-Zionist conflict from its inception in the 1920s until today. Many more people have been made homeless in Syria than were ever turned into refugees by the Arab-Israeli wars. If the United Nations had worked to deter Iran and its allies in the last five years, how many Syrian lives would have been saved, and how many families would have remained safe in their homes?

The second fallacy is the idea that Israeli settlements on the West Bank are the primary impediment to peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians. The experience of the George W. Bush Administration, in which I served, taught us the opposite. It was a relatively easy matter for a President who is sympathetic to Israel's security concerns to convince the Israeli Government to limit territorial expansion of Israeli settlements. Early reports coming from the Trump Administration suggest that President Trump may have reached, or is in the process of reaching, a similar accommodation with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Historically, however, it has proven much harder to convince the Palestinian Authority to cease its incitement of its own population, whether through the naming of squares after terrorists, encouraging anti-Israeli attacks, glorifying terrorism in children's textbooks, or paying Government compensation to terrorists and their families. The extensive resources that the United Nations and its Members contribute to the upkeep of the Palestinian Authority give them a right to insist that those funds be used to foster a culture of tolerance based on a vision of two States living side by side in peace.

The third fallacy is the idea that Israeli intransigence is the key stumbling block in Arab-Israeli relations, and that, therefore, Israeli concessions are the key factor that will create the conditions for a settlement. The Israeli withdrawals from Lebanon in 2000 and Gaza in 2005 should have dispelled this idea forever. Rather than having a calming effect, however, those withdrawals served only to increase the bloodlust of Hizbullah and Hamas.

The lesson was not lost on the Israelis. Any withdrawal from territory on the West Bank, therefore, must come with ironclad guarantees of Israeli security. Given the unsettled state of the region in general, the advances of the Iranian alliance in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen, the persistence of Al-Qaida and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, and the split among the Palestinians between Hamas and Fatah, no Israeli Government could take severe risks with respect to Israeli security on the West Bank and still hope to remain in power.

Israelis are already intensely aware that in a very short period of time they might find themselves peering across the Golan Heights at Iranian soldiers ensconced in Syria. How can the world ask them to take steps that could potentially lead to the Iranian penetration of the West Bank as well?

Those three fallacies foster a general perspective that places an exaggerated importance on Israeli actions. It misinterprets the behaviour of Arab and Muslim actors as a reaction to the Jewish State rather than as a product of their own regional strategies and perceptions. It encourages the Security Council, unconsciously perhaps, to reward the Palestinian Authority's efforts to internationalize the conflict — to look to the United Nations to intercede on its behalf in negotiations with Israel.

This drift toward internationalization is fraught with danger. When the United Nations replaces the Palestinians as the interlocutor with Israel regarding the final status of the West Bank, it reduces the chances for peace, because it does nothing to allay the very real security concerns of Israel. A better path forward is to urge the Palestinians back to direct negotiations. While the likelihood that those negotiations will result in a quick resolution of the final status issues is small, there is reason to be optimistic about interim accommodations that are manifestly in the interests of both sides. The new willingness of Sunni Arab States, which share Israel's concerns about Iran, to support constructive solutions is especially heartening.

I would like again to remind the Security Council of the example of Gamal Abdel Nasser. A revisionist school of historiography claims that he never wanted war in 1967. His best military units were bogged down in Yemen, his economy was a shambles and his

relations with Jordan and Syria, his putative allies, were abysmal. Why would a leader in such a precarious position behave so recklessly?

The revisionists have much of the story correct, but they miss a crucial factor. Nasser was applying lessons that he had learned a decade earlier, during the Suez crisis. Then, as in 1967, he had precipitated a war that he could not possibly win militarily, but which he believed he could win politically, because, he gambled, the super-Powers and the United Nations would intercede on his behalf. In 1956, that proved a very smart bet. In 1967, however, it utterly failed — with disastrous consequences for Egypt — to say nothing of the Palestinians. How much better would it have been for all parties if, back in 1956, the United Nations had insisted that, in return for an Israeli withdrawal from Egyptian territory, Nasser must grant Israel meaningful security guarantees?

The key lesson of the 1967 war is that peace is best achieved not by United Nations intercession but by facilitating direct negotiations between the parties.

I thank the Council again for the honour of addressing it on this important issue.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I have taken note of Mr. Doran's statement.

I now give the floor to Mr. Brahimi.

Mr. Brahimi: I am deeply grateful to the President for his kind invitation. I am greatly honoured to be back in this Chamber, this time as a member of The Elders.

Our founder, Nelson Mandela, was passionate about Palestine. He spoke about it repeatedly and always forcefully. He discussed his views with Jewish leaders in South Africa and the United States, and he thought he had convinced some of them that his support for the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and freedom was politically and morally right. When he launched The Elders, he gave our group three priorities. Palestine was one of them. In response, The Elders visited Palestine and Israel four times in the past eight years. Neither Prime Minister Netanyahu nor any member of his Government has ever agreed to meet them. We fully share Mandela's view that the Palestinians should have their State, that the two States of Israel and Palestine should live side by side in peace and that the security of all States in the region should be assured. The sad reality, however, is that 50 years after the start of Israel's occupation of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, little of consequence has been done to bring about a viable Palestinian State on those territories.

I am sure that many Council members read Nathan Thrall's 2 June article in *The New York Times*. With regard to the ongoing occupation, he says that this

> "resilient and eminently sustainable arrangement has stood on three pillars: American backing, Palestinian weakness and Israeli indifference. Together, these three ensure that for the Israeli Government, continuing its occupation is far less costly than the concessions required to end it".

I believe that the article implies that there is a fourth pillar sustaining the situation, and that is the near-total paralysis of the Security Council. Which of those pillars might change in order to break the deadlock? Apparently, not America's unconditional support for Israel. Thrall says,

> "Americans are told that Israel will have to choose, and very soon, to give Palestinians either citizenship or independence, and choose to either remain a democracy or become an apartheid State. Yet none of these groups calls on the United States to force this supposed imminent choice, no matter how many times Israel demonstrates that it prefers a different, far easier option: continued occupation."

Since 1967, the Palestinian people have endured grave acts of oppression, violence and collective punishment. During that time, Israel has built approximately 125 settlements and more than 100 so-called outposts on occupied Palestinian land, all in violation of international law. They have placed roughly 650,000 illegal settlers in Palestine, with 350,000 in the West Bank and 300,000 in East Jerusalem. They have imprisoned 800,000 Palestinians and destroyed 48,000 homes. They have revoked the residence permits of 250,000 Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza and more than 14,000 in East Jerusalem. The West Bank is fragmented by the separation wall and a multitude of other Israeli-imposed controls that affect Palestinian dignity and prevent the people from going about their normal business unhindered.

The Palestinian population is indeed extremely vulnerable and in desperate need of protection from the international community. That protection should be provided for under international law, notably the Fourth Geneva Convention. Regrettably, however, in the

Palestinian territories today the Geneva Conventions are referred to more in the breach than the observance. I would particularly like to draw the Council's attention to the dire situation in the Gaza Strip. There, another dismal milestone is being marked this year, the tenth anniversary of the imposition of a blockade that amounts to collective punishment of all of Gaza's 1.7 million people.

I have participated in only one of The Elders visits to Gaza, and that was in 2010. The misery in that unhappy, overcrowded strip of land is difficult to describe and more difficult to endure. A young woman student told us,

> "Israel put us in a concentration camp. Those who call themselves our leaders are taking away the air we breathe".

Only through the tireless efforts of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the World Food Programme and other United Nations agencies, as well as persistent interventions by the Secretary-General's Special Coordinator for the Middle Peace Process, are Gazans able to survive. But what kind of life is it for them — a densely crowded environment, half-destroyed cities, no work, undrinkable water, electricity available for only a few hours a day when it is available at all, and their basic humanity robbed by constant humiliation and the need to depend for survival on the charity of others? To add insult to injury, the irresponsible failure of the Palestinian leaders, especially those of Fatah and Hamas, to reconcile and unite is a huge hindrance both to the daily life of the people and to the struggle of civil society, prisoners and others to mobilize national, regional and international support for the fight against occupation.

Despite James Wolfensohn's personal commitment and commendable efforts, the Quartet achieved little before the appointment of Mr. Tony Blair, and since then has been totally absent. As I am sure the Council knows, many today think that the Quartet has outlived its usefulness. Nevertheless, there is a crying and urgent need for the Security Council to play an active role in that regard. The Council might wish to begin by organizing a visit of all its members to Israel and Palestine. Remarkably, considering the longevity of this issue on the Council's agenda, and the frequency of its visits to other conflict zones, there has been no field visit for many decades. On that trip, the members could take the opportunity to talk to all parties, but above all to civil-society representatives in Israel and Palestine. They could thereby see for themselves all the harm that has been done to the Palestinian people, as well as what the occupation is doing to the psychological and moral fibre of the men, women and children of both the occupying Power and the occupied people. In that connection, I would like to put on record The Elders appreciation for the work of the peace movement in Israel and its brave human rights defenders such as B'Tselem, Breaking the Silence, and the Israeli Committee against House Demolition, as well as the writings of such outstanding authors as Gideon Levy and Uri Avnery.

If the Council could make such a visit, its members would see how urgent it is to enforce the many binding resolutions that the Council has adopted since the June 1967 war, starting with resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and including the most recent, resolution 2334 (2016), which focused on the illegality of settlement building. In that connection, is there any need to remind the Council that resolution 2334 (2016) is already being flouted? The recent Israeli Government decision to legalize the so-called outposts in the West Bank once again demonstrates its disregard for international law and the Council's decisions.

The not-so-discreet contacts of the Israeli Government with some countries in the region cannot be a substitute for peace with the Palestinians. Only a genuine, just solution to the Palestinian problem will open the way to lasting peace and cooperation between Israel and all its neighbours.

The Arab Peace Initiative provides a sound basis for that to happen. Issued at the Arab Summit in Beirut in 2002, the Initiative has been ignored by the Israeli Government all these years. Unanimously, Arab countries called on Israel and all Israelis

> "to accept this Initiative in order to safeguard the prospects for peace and stop the further shedding of blood, enabling the Arab countries and Israel to live in peace and good neighbourliness and provide future generations with security, stability and prosperity."

Israeli politicians of the left and of the right and the media in Israel and civil society routinely speak of the danger of apartheid. Some warn that their country may become an apartheid State; others denounce practices that are already creating an apartheid system. Be that as

it may, Palestinians have rights. They have individual rights like all human beings and they have collective rights like any other people in the world. And they have the right to fight for their rights with all the legitimate means available to them.

The Charter of the United Nations, international law and international humanitarian law, as well as all norms of international solidarity, call for effective support to be given to the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people against occupation and oppression. Such support will in fact help liberate both Palestine and Israel.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I sincerely thank Mr. Brahimi, member of The Elders, for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Security Council who wish to make statements.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): I thank all of our briefers who spoke with us today.

First, the United States condemns in the strongest terms the cowardly terrorist attack last week in Jerusalem. This stabbing attack left one Israeli border guard dead and wounded several others. We express our deepest sympathies to the victims and their families. The United States reiterates its commitment to stand with Israel against these forces of terror.

Hamas is one of those forces of terror, which yet again showed its true colours to the world earlier this month. It is a terrorist organization so ruthless that it will not hesitate to put the lives of innocent children on the line. A few weeks ago, United Nations officials discovered a tunnel underneath two schools run by the United Nations in Gaza. It was the exact type of tunnel that Hamas has used for years. Those tunnels are what Hamas uses to smuggle in the materials they need to make rockets or to sneak into Israel to attack civilians or kidnap them in the dead of night. Imagine children playing in their schoolyard while Hamas moves explosives underneath their feet. Imagine children trying to learn while a few feet below terrorists might have been crawling towards Israel. All of this was happening under a building flying a flag of the United Nations. It is an outrage.

But when we consider Hamas and the other terrorist organizations that operate in Gaza, the existence of that tunnel should not be a surprise. This is the way Hamas does business. Tunnels in heavily populated civilian areas are its signature. Hamas hides military infrastructure in and around apartment buildings, hospitals and, as we saw again this month, United Nations compounds. In this way, Hamas consciously plots and plans to attack civilians and it uses the cover of civilian buildings to launch those attacks. It is a sick and cynical strategy.

There is a terrible humanitarian crisis in Gaza. We remain a strong supporter of Gaza's recovery and reconstruction. I myself was at the Gaza border earlier this month, where Special Coordinator Mladenov briefed me on the latest chilling developments. What is happening to the people of Gaza is heartbreaking, and it is so preventable. Gaza is prime real estate on the Mediterranean Sea. It has enormous potential, but the potential is being squandered by the terrorists who govern it.

Make no mistake: Israel did not cause the problems in Gaza, even though it is often the usual suspect around here. Ten years ago every Israeli soldier was withdrawn from Gaza, and for the past 10 years, there has not been a single Israeli settler in Gaza. Other outside countries and political factions are also not the cause of Gaza's problems. We all would like to see Palestinians in Gaza receive the aid they so desperately need, and we will continue to work to find avenues to get aid safely to them. But we should never forget that the responsibility for this humanitarian crisis rests squarely with the one group that actually controls Gaza: Hamas.

Hamas has exercised control over Gaza since 2007. After 10 years of Hamas rule, life for the people of Gaza is worse than ever before. Rather than govern, Hamas chooses to devote its resources to building a terrorist arsenal. Rather than pursuing peace, Hamas chooses to provoke destructive wars. Rather than allowing help to reach the Palestinian people, Hamas chooses to divert untold amounts of aid to feed its military enterprise.

I saw how this works firsthand. I walked through one of the terrorist tunnels coming out of the Gaza Strip, which Israel discovered and has since secured. The top and sides of the tunnel were lined with solid, sturdy concrete. We know how badly Palestinians in Gaza need concrete to rebuild their homes. But there, in that tunnel, we see how Hamas uses the concrete Gaza receives — not to help the people, but to fortify its terrorist infrastructure. Hamas remains a terrorist organization bent on Israel's destruction. Its goal is to defeat Israel by force. It will use all the resources it can to continue the fight.

The Security Council must stand up to condemn Hamas' terror. Hamas represents yet another regional threat that the Council far too often ignores. While United Nations agencies and Member States dissect Israel's actions, few speak out against the terror that Hamas continues to plot. Some States Members of the Organization even maintain ties to Hamas and other terrorist groups that flourish in Gaza.

The Security Council must unite to say that enough is enough. We need to pressure Hamas to end its tyranny over the people of Gaza. We should condemn Hamas in the Council's resolutions and statements. We should name Hamas as the group responsible when rockets are fired from Gaza or when fresh tunnels are discovered. And we should designate Hamas as a terrorist organization in a resolution, with consequences for anyone who continues to support it. That is how we can help build a more peaceful Middle East, and how we can fulfil our responsibility on the Council to actually maintain international peace and security. And while we must do whatever we can to ease the suffering of the people in Gaza, we must also recognize that the suffering will not be fully addressed until the terrorists lose their grip on power.

All States have a role to play here. We must do much more to show Hamas that we will never tolerate terrorism. We must show that when Hamas uses homes and schools to hide its terrorist infrastructure, there will be consequences. Those who give Hamas the arms, money and political support to operate must cease. And if they do not, Member States of the United Nations need to come together to put real pressure on supporters of Hamas to stop. Together, we can show Hamas that their terrorist tactics will lead only to more isolation. Together, we can show Hamas that their terrorist tactics will fail. We should act now, before Hamas puts the people of Gaza at risk again by building more tunnels under their feet.

I want to conclude by saying that I spent a lot of time in Israel and also in Palestinian areas. I spoke with Israeli and Palestinian leaders. I went to schools of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. I went to every border of Israel. I saw the threats. There are threats that completely surround Israel from every single side.

The Council can go and do what it always does — pick a side, bashing either Israel or the Palestinian Authority. That will get us nowhere. But anyone who has seen what I saw — the current terrorist activity in that area — would understand that every ounce of what we say in the Council, pitting the two sides against each other, is only strengthening the terrorists. Every ounce of what we do should combat Hamas. They are a dangerous actor that has no care for the Palestinians, no care for the Israelis, and is determined to destroy everything in their path.

Once again, we are having this meeting, and once again we will hear speeches on whether a country is for Israel, against Israel, for Palestinians or against Palestinians. But I would ask that each country address the real threat that is causing so many people harm — the threat of Hamas.

Mr. Wilson (United Kingdom): I join others in welcoming our briefers this morning and I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Mladenov for his second report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) and for all his tireless work.

As each briefer made clear, the Middle East continues to face an unrelenting human tragedy of multiple conflicts and rising tensions. For many in the region, it is a tragedy that has gone on for over half a century. We recognize that the anniversary of the Six-Day War holds great significance for all sides of the Arab-Israeli conflict. For Israelis, it marks the anniversary of a war from which Israel emerged victorious against all the odds. For Palestinians, it marks an enduring tragedy of 50 years of occupation, 50 years without self-determination.

Let us be clear: half a century of Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza is a tragedy for all sides — a tragedy for Palestinians, who yearn for independence, and a tragedy for Israelis, who yearn for peace and security. It is a tragedy that has been exploited, with terrorist groups such as Hamas and Hizbullah cynically manipulating the narrative of occupation for their own ends.

So many decades of violence, loss, anger and hate only prove that conflicts cannot be managed or contained in perpetuity. This year we must move towards peace, with the support of the region and the international community, rather than towards an uncertain and dangerous future. Support for a two-State solution is the only way to ensure a just and lasting resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. If we are to make that a reality, it is incumbent upon both sides

to refrain from any steps that damage the prospects of a two-State solution.

That means the people of Israel must live free from the scourge of terrorism and anti-Semitic incitement, which gravely undermine the prospects for a two-State solution. We condemn the horrific murder of Hadas Malka, a 23-year-old Israeli policewoman last Friday. We condemn the recent discovery of part of a tunnel passing under two United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East schools in Gaza. We call on Hamas to renounce violence and dismantle its tunnel network. They cannot be allowed to pose a threat to Israel's security.

If the two-State solution is to become a reality, it also must mean Israel refraining from further settlement expansion. Only last week, the United Kingdom's Foreign Secretary condemned Israel's latest announcement to build over 3,000 settlement units throughout the West Bank. The number of units planned for construction this year is now at its highest in a quarter of a century. Those moves undermine the physical viability of two States for two peoples.

Despite those challenges, the United Kingdom's long-standing position on the Middle East peace process remains clear and unchanged. We support a negotiated settlement leading to a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian State based on 1967 borders — with agreed land swaps, with Jerusalem as the shared capital of both States and a just, fair, agreed and realistic settlement for refugees.

But that vision has proved elusive for far too long. The changing regional context in converging Arab and Israeli interests presents a unique opening to develop Arab-Israeli relations and create the conditions for serious Israeli-Palestinian talks to resume. With that in mind, we welcome the reaffirmation of the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States of the Arab Peace Initiative here today. We must support the leadership and engagement that President Trump and his Administration have demonstrated in reinvigorating the Middle East peace process.

We call on the region, Israelis and Palestinians to seize the opportunity that this presents and turn 2017 not just into another anniversary of occupation but a new anniversary of peace. We cannot afford to fail. As Special Coordinator Mladenov made clear, there is an urgent need to address the dire and deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza with over 65,000 people currently displaced.

The ongoing energy crisis is particularly concerning. Energy supplying Gaza will soon fall to just three hours per day. That is having a serious humanitarian impact, disrupting basic services, including water treatment and essential medical operations. This latest crisis underlines the need for de-escalation, dialogue and a durable agreement between Palestinian actors that results in the Palestinian Authority's full control over the Gaza Strip.

Before I conclude, let me turn briefly to the situation in Lebanon. We welcome the new electoral law, ratified by the Lebanese Parliament on 16 June. It is an important milestone towards continued governance and stability, which paves the way for new elections. But we must not forget the importance of ensuring stability flowing across the whole of Lebanon. In that regard, we are concerned about the increase in Hizbullah rhetoric along Lebanon's southern border and we call on both sides to abide by resolutions 1701 (2006) and 1559 (2004). Renewed conflict is in neither side's interest. We call on all actors to take steps to de-escalate tensions.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank all of the briefers for their contributions this morning, particularly the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, and I assure him of the full support of Uruguay in carrying out his work.

Uruguay welcomes the presentation of the second report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). We regret that there is no accompanying written report, as it contains a great deal of information that requires a careful reading. As such, we must now wait two or three days for the oral version to be transcribed into the Security Council meetings records. We do not understand why no written report was submitted and why we must wait for the records to be published.

Fifty years of war. Fifty years marred by violence, serious military clashes, terrorist attacks, abductions, killings and the death of tens of thousands of innocent civilians, as well as the suffering of millions. The roots of this conflict stretch far back into the pages of history. The people's hopes of living in peace and security were dashed by inequality, lack of opportunities, intolerance and mutual accusations in which one side is always right and acts properly and the other side is wrong and acts perversely.

Thus, tensions mounted every few years and clashes resulted in maximum destruction and death. Until one day, perhaps exhausted by the pointless shedding of so much blood and having understood that they could continue for years without either party emerging victorious, they had the courage to cease hostilities, sit down for talks and opt for peace.

It is clear that I am talking about the peace process in Colombia. Members will ask why I am referring today to Colombia. The answer is simple. Colombia best exemplifies that peace can be achieved after a long conflict if the parties involved show a real and firm commitment to negotiate and reach an agreement and have the courage to risk everything so as to abide by the agreement.

The Peace Agreement in Colombia sent a powerful message of hope throughout the world at a time when numerous armed conflicts continued to take place, including one of the most prolonged and complex of them, which has confronted Israel and Palestine for the past 70 years.

The United Nations and the Security Council have stood witness to the conflict between Israel and Palestine since its inception. For seven decades, unilateral, regional and multilateral efforts have been made to advance peace in the Middle East. There have been moments of real hope and milestones, such as the Oslo Accords, the Quartet's road map and the Arab Peace Initiative, among others, whereby it seems that the progress achieved is rapidly dissolved by the decisions and actions of one or both parties, thereby heightening tensions and only encouraging the most extremist positions.

Regrettably, for years, we have witnessed an unsustainable situation that risks voiding efforts made thus far to achieve peace. In that context, six months ago, the Security Council adopted resolution 2334 (2016), aimed at stabilizing and reversing negative trends on the ground that jeopardize the prospects of peace and the two-State solution. It was a clear demonstration of the importance that the international community places on the peaceful and successful conclusion of this process. Despite that, to date, Israel has stepped up its announcements to continue its settlement policy in the occupied territories, which flouts that resolution and resolution 242 (1967), which affirms that the acquisition of territory by force is inadmissible.

Similarly, the continuation of violent incidents and terrorist attacks, the silence of complicity, the lack of censure and punishment in connection with their incitement and glorification and the incomprehensible policy of financially compensating the families of prisoners or those who die in the commission of such acts does not in any way advance peace by seriously placing in jeopardy the possibility of achieving the two-State solution. Uruguay has condemned and will continue to condemn such acts vigorously.

Together with the overwhelming majority of the international community, Uruguay strongly supports the solution of two independent States and is convinced that that is the only option that will lead to the peaceful coexistence of Israel and Palestine. For that to happen, the parties will have to facilitate conditions for finding a negotiated settlement that is mutually acceptable and resolves pending issues related to the conflict.

As we have done unequivocally since 1947, we once again reaffirm our unconditional support for the right of Israel and Palestine to live in peace, within secure and recognized borders and in an atmosphere of renewed cooperation, free of any threats or actions that would jeopardize peace.

It is essential to reverse current trends on the ground that will make establishing a Palestinian State extremely difficult. It is also necessary that the Israeli and Palestinian authorities fulfil their obligations under international law and pursuant to the Council's resolutions and send a clear political message so as to break free from the vicious cycle of mutual mistrust.

After the 70 years during which Israel established itself as an integrated and modern State and a full Member of the Organization, Palestine continues to face serious difficulties in connection with its development, international integration and consolidation of its territory, which entail serious repercussions for its people and increased tensions in the entire region.

Furthermore, the Israeli occupation of territories, which constitutes a clear violation of international law and the relevant resolutions of the Council, has also contributed to causing a serious humanitarian situation for the Palestinians remaining in those territories and for those seeking refuge in other countries of the region. That is a historical injustice that must be righted by the parties with the support of international community and the Council.

Uruguay welcomes all international, regional and unilateral initiatives that will allow for progress in the quest for solutions in the peace process in the Middle East so as to achieve a peaceful, fair, negotiated and lasting solution in line with international law, thereby enshrining the legitimate aspirations of both parties. We continue to call on both parties to resume direct bilateral negotiations as soon as possible without preconditions as an essential step towards achieving peace and the two-State solution — a goal shared by the vast majority of Israelis and Palestinians and denied to them thus far by their leaders.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his video briefing. I also thank Secretary-General Aboul-Gheit, Mr. Brahimi and Mr. Doran for their presence and briefings.

The question of Palestine has dragged on for years and has defied resolutions owing to its complexity. Palestine and Israel have been neighbours for ever, and their lots are closely linked. They in effect share a common destiny. Only by resolving disputes and differences through dialogue and consultations and turning their swords into ploughshares will they be able to find an answer to the Palestinian question and the more fundamental issues concerning the Middle East.

The international community should act with a renewed sense of urgency and collectively shoulder the responsibility of defending the legitimate rights and interests of the Palestinian people. There is an urgent need for both sides to exercise restraint and take concrete actions to resume peace talks without delay so as to realize the two-State solution as soon as possible.

First, an independent State of Palestine and the peaceful coexistence between Palestine and Israel is the correct path for the efforts of the international community. The establishment of a fully sovereign State of Palestine based on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital is the inalienable right of the Palestinian people, as well as the key to resolving the Palestinian question. Based on the principle of land-for-peace, the two-State solution, the Arab Peace Initiative and the relevant Security Council resolutions, all parties should determinedly promote the peace process.

Secondly, both sides should continue to demonstrate good will and resume talks without delay in line with the interests of the two peoples. Both sides should effectively implement resolution 2334 (2016) and, in both words and actions, demonstrate their sincerity to return to peace talks and rebuild trust. Violence directed against innocent civilians must stop. Israel should cease its settlement expansion and its closure of the Gaza Strip, and, at the same time, step up efforts to improve the livelihoods of the Palestinian people.

Thirdly, the international community should build consensus and synergy, which are an indispensable external condition for resolving the Palestinian issue. China welcomes the League of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and countries with influence as they play a greater role and step up their efforts with both parties to consolidate the will for peace talks and build momentum. The leading role of the United Nations should be brought into full play and any results of such efforts should be endorsed by the Security Council.

China supports all international efforts aimed at promoting peace between Palestine and Israel. Recently, the relevant parties engaged in diplomatic efforts to promote the resumption of talks. We hope that both parties will continue their positive response in order to relaunch negotiations at an early date. China is a staunch supporter of the just cause of the Palestinian people and an active mediator for peace between Palestine and Israel. In 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping put forward a four-point proposal for resolving the Palestinian issue. In 2016, Foreign Minister Wang Yi proposed three steps and deadlines for relaunching the peace process. China's Special Envoy on the Middle East Issue recently visited Palestine and Israel to encourage both sides to meet each other halfway. China is ready to step up its efforts with all relevant parties to promote an early, comprehensive and just solution to the Palestinian-Israeli issue so as to realize peace and stability in the Middle East.

Today, 20 June, is World Refugee Day. The international community should not forget the plight of millions of Palestinian refugees and should continue to provide humanitarian assistance to them. We commend and support the efforts of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and laud the refugee-receiving countries on their contributions. China will continue to provide assistance to Palestine, including by helping Palestine to achieve social and economic development under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to thank Mr. Mladenov,

Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General; His Excellency Mr. Aboul-Gheit, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States; and Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, member of The Elders, for their detailed briefings.

The fiftieth anniversary of Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory on the West Bank of the Jordan River and the Gaza Strip occurs at a time of turbulent transformation of the Middle East and North Africa. Russia condemns terrorism in all of its forms and manifestations. We are outraged and express our condolences to all who have fallen victim to such heinous crimes.

With the rise of international terrorism to the centre stage of global affairs as the main threat, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has been unfairly pushed into the background. In that adverse context, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict continues to deepen. The two-State prospect is waning. Rather than addressing it, destabilizing factors fraught with risk of escalation have only worsened. They now loom large over Gaza. The absence of a political horizon is due to a chronic stalemate in the peace process. It has reinforced a sense of despair for the average person, first and foremost in Palestine. As a consequence, radicals have been given additional room for manoeuvre.

Russia's position on the Middle East conflict has remained guided by principle and consistency. We firmly believe that a just solution to the Palestinian problem is of key importance for improving the situation in the entire region. If not solved, the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine will continue to taint international affairs, frustrate efforts to settle other regional crises and fuel terrorism. In that regard, we advocate a comprehensive, fair and lasting solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on the basis of international law. That includes Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative, which was just affirmed by His Excellency Mr. Aboul-Gheit.

We are sure that a lasting solution to the conflict can be found through direct talks between sides, without preconditions. Such talks should lead to an end to Israel's occupation of Arab land that began in 1967. They should lead to the creation of an independent, viable Palestinian State with contiguous borders, existing side by side in peace with Israel, within safe and recognized borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital and West Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. We see no alternative to the two-State solution. We believe that it is the only realistic manner in which to halt the face-off between Israel and Palestine and the claims they levy against each another. We call upon Palestinians and Israelis to refrain from using violence and unilateral actions that might skew the outcome of the peace process. That pertains to the building of Israeli settlements on occupied Palnestinian territory. We are sure that, more than ever today, there is a need to take practical steps to break the dangerous deadlock in the peace process.

To that end, we continue to make efforts to bring about the resumption of direct political dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis, bilaterally and in other formats. Our initiative to convene a meeting between President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu in Moscow remains on the table. We would like to see a speedy resumption of activity from the Middle East Quartet of international mediators. Let us not forget about the issue of inter-Palestinian divisions. Regrettably, such divisions are also at their 10-year mark. Effectively overcoming divisions on the basis of the political platform of the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the Arab Peace Initiative is in line with the national interests of all Palestinians and will serve to improve the situation in Gaza and create a sound basis for the success of a future political process.

Russia is making its contribution to reinstating Palestinian unity and notes the efforts of other States, in particular the Arab Republic of Egypt.

We would like to call the attention of the Security Council to the fact that the destabilization of the situation in the Middle East and North Africa has a most serious impact on the Christians living there and on other religious and ethnic minorities. Extremists draw upon ethnic and religious factors to incite hatred and fill their own ranks. Russia continues its efforts to curb attacks on Christians and other minorities, as well as to prevent the fragmentation of civilizations and religions. That is the very lens through which we should consider the joint statement of February last year issued by Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and all Rus' and Pope Francis in Havana. It was an appeal to take swift steps to halt the mass exodus of Christians from Middle Eastern countries. That was also the goal of the 7 April Tashkent joint statement issued by the Foreign Ministers of the Commonwealth of Independent States, with regard to the inadmissibility of discrimination and

intolerance against Christians, Muslims and membersof other religions.

History has many nuances but one thing remains clear. We established the Security Council to bring Member States together, not divide them. Today's review of the situation in the Middle East underscores an indisputable fact — resolving the numerous problems, new and old, in this long-suffering region is possible only through political and diplomatic means and collective efforts. A choice must be made for dialogue and engagement, rather than isolation and animosity. We think that pooling cooperation between the Security Council and the League of Arab States would serve this cause. The joint meeting between the Security Council and the League of Arab States in Cairo in May 2016 created a necessary foundation for these endeavours. However, we must realize that the situation in the Middle East can be improved only with the formation of a broad front of States working to suppress the terrorist threat. Today the relevant initiative — presented by the President of Russia, Mr. Vladimir Putin, to the General Assembly in September 2015 (see A/70/PV.13) — is gaining even more relevance. Russia stands ready to engage in collective work, and it is in constant contact with all States of the region.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): We express our appreciation to the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Mladenov, for his comprehensive and objective briefing. We also thank all the invited briefers for their thoughtful and important contribution to this significant issue.

As we continue to witness unprecedented, grave crises in the Middle East, which have been a major destabilizing factor in global security for five decades, we believe that now is the time to seriously address those issues. Kazakhstan's position on the Middle East process is crystal clear and remains unchanged. We support negotiations that would result in a two-State solution and call for the prompt resumption of such negotiations, especially in the bilateral format, without preconditions. The ultimate goal should be the restoration and promotion of the peace process, in accordance with resolutions 242 (1067) and 338 (1973), the Madrid principles, the land for peace formula and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Kazakhstan strongly believes that the Security Council and individual United Nations institutions should work together to develop a new, more detailed road map reflecting the demands and wishes of Israelis and Palestinians. Such a road map could help to facilitate direct talks between the sides. There should be a stop to settlement enlargement on the Palestinian territories, which could lead to a new cycle of violence that nobody wants.

My country underscores the importance of achieving inter-Palestinian unity. There should be a unified Palestinian voice in negotiations with Israel and the international community. The difficult humanitarian situation in the region, which includes, inter alia, extreme poverty, growing unemployment and the chronic economic backwardness of Gaza, contributes to instability and frustration, which can, in turn, create conditions that lead to the resumption of the conflict. Kazakhstan is particularly concerned about the gravity of the Palestinian situation and calls for urgent international action to mitigate suffering. The blockades and checkpoints imposed on Gaza only aggravate the social, economic and humanitarian situation and diminish the prospects for peace.

We welcome and support Israel's decision to provide some economic concessions to the Palestinians to facilitate and ease the conditions of daily living in the territory of the Palestinian Authority.

Finally, Kazakhstan is convinced that the efforts of the co-sponsors of the peace process, international and regional organizations, as well as the good will of all sides and actors in the negotiating process, should bring a political solution to the Middle East.

Mr. Kawamura (Japan): At the outset, I would also like to thank the briefers for their informative briefings.

I appreciate Mr. Mladenov's briefing on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), which deals with prominent obstacles to achieving just and sustainable peace in the region. I would like to stress that the resolution must be taken as a whole, and all efforts must contribute to the re-launching of political dialogue, which is a fundamental method of conflict resolution.

Japan continues to support a two-State solution based on the 1967 lines, with mutually agreed swaps, in a way that will achieve the peaceful co-existence of a viable Palestinian State and Israel within secure and recognized borders. The obstacles mentioned in the resolution continue to exist and hamper the peace process. In the last three months, we heard announcements of

the building of a new settlement, and the expansion of housing units within existing settlements in the West Bank. Japan remains firm in its position that settlement activities are in violation of international law, and has repeatedly called upon the Government of Israel to fully freeze settlement activities.

Cases of violence, such as the shooting and stabbing attack in the vicinity of the Old City of Jerusalem last week, cannot be justified for any reason. Such attacks intensify the cycle of violence, and Japan is concerned about the further cases of violence that followed. Japan condemns all acts of violence and rejects incitement and the glorification of violence, as they are fundamentally incompatible with a peaceful resolution of the conflict. In that regard, Japan is increasingly concerned about the deteriorating situation in Gaza, which was mentioned by Mr. Mladenov in his briefing. Extreme power shortages in Gaza are affecting every aspect of human life, including health, water, sanitation and municipal services. Desperation and frustration felt on the ground may cause a further unstable security situation, and the risk is increasing as we speak today. The crisis points to the importance of promoting reconciliation among the Palestinians. Furthermore, it points to the importance of working towards easing and eventually lifting the Gaza blockade, while duly taking security concerns into account.

Japan, for its part, has provided economic assistance worth $34 million to Palestine so far this year, half of which is used to assist the livelihood of the people of Gaza. Resolution 2334 (2016) also calls upon the parties to exert collective efforts to launch credible negotiations on final-status issues. Japan appreciates the efforts made by various parties to promote dialogue between the parties. We are especially encouraged by the dialogue between the United States and the relevant parties at the highest levels, and believe that it is essential to promoting the peace process.

Japan is contributing to confidence-building efforts between the Israelis and the Palestinians, which will form the basis for credible negotiations. The Jericho Agro-Industrial Park, which is celebrating its tenth anniversary, currently hosts six Palestinian firms, creating jobs on the ground. This was only possible because of cooperation among Japan, Israel, Palestine and Jordan. Through cooperation, mutual trust is fostered and the know-how of economic development is gained. There is potential to enhance the collaborative nature of the project. We are currently encouraging other States to visit the Jericho Agro-Industrial Park and to consider the participation of private-sector firms in the project.

Fifty years of occupation and nearly 70 years of unresolved conflict should remind all of us of the heavy cost incurred in the region and of the opportunities that were missed. Japan reiterates that peace would unlock new political, economic, security and cultural opportunities, to the benefit of the region and beyond. To that end, Japan will continue its engagement through political dialogue with the parties, confidence-building in the region and economic assistance to the Palestinians.

Mr. Skau (Sweden): Let me begin by thanking the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, Mr. Ahmed Aboul-Gheit; the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov; and Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi for their briefings and for their tireless efforts striving for peace. I also thank Mr. Michael Doran for sharing his perspective with the Council today.

This month marks 50 years since the 1967 Six-Day War, which resulted in the occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Gaza and the Syrian Golan. Since then, the Palestinian question has rarely been far from the top of the Council's agenda, with the Council, in successive resolutions, calling for the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East that includes the withdrawal of Israel from the occupied territories.

The hardships faced by generations of Palestinians during the Israeli occupation are numerous, not least for those forced to leave their homes to seek refuge elsewhere. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which has supported Palestinian refugees since 1950, now faces a chronically difficult financial situation. As a major donor to the Agency, Sweden fully supports the recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's recent report on sustainable funding. To mobilize the much-needed political and financial support, we look forward to hosting a high-level meeting, together with Jordan and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, on 21 September during this year's session of the General Assembly.

Today I would like to make three points on what we believe is needed now to move forward.

First, the international community remains clear in its stance on the occupation and the need for a two-State solution. But we must act before it is too late; otherwise, the solution that the Council is striving for — two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security — will move beyond our reach, resulting in a one-State reality and perpetual occupation.

A renewed peace effort between Israelis and Palestinians is needed. After decades of violence and suffering that has affected both sides, this anniversary reminds us that the parties alone are not able to resolve the conflict. Together with the Israelis and Palestinians, the international community and the Council have a responsibility to remain engaged to end the occupation and achieve peace.

The United States has always played a leading role in efforts to resolve the conflict. United States leadership to revive the peace process is key, and we welcome the efforts made by the United States Administration in this regard.

Regional partners also have a key role to play. The Arab Peace Initiative, as Secretary-General Aboul-Gheit has outlined today, is essential. Any regional effort should build on this initiative, as it could contribute to a new dynamic benefiting all actors.

The support and active engagement of the people directly affected, particularly the youth of Israel and Palestine, is also much needed. Generations have grown up shaped by recurring cycles of violence and retribution. People-to-people contacts are now at a record low. Sweden, actively engaged with civil society in both Israel and Palestine, calls for a re-engagement with young people, in line with resolution 2250 (2015), and the revival of a public debate on the prospects for peace and a two-State solution. We must show the post-Oslo generation that there is an alternative to violence and occupation; after all, it is their future that is at stake. The purpose of Sweden's recognition of Palestine was to contribute to making the parties less unequal and to give hope and belief in the future to young Palestinians and Israelis alike.

Secondly, the humanitarian situation in Gaza is deteriorating by the day. The civilian population, particularly women and children, is bearing the brunt of the suffering. The decision of the Israeli Government, with the consent of the Palestinian Authority, to further reduce electricity supplies to Gaza is adding to the suffering and risks, leading to a dangerous escalation. A new conflict in Gaza would be in no one's interest, and we must prevent it from happening. We continue to call on all Palestinian factions to engage, in good faith, in a reconciliation process leading to a unified Palestinian leadership and a reunification of Gaza with the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

Thirdly, we welcome the Secretary-General's quarterly report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). The resolution contains clear messages to both parties, and both parties have a duty to implement its provisions, including by ensuring accountability for acts of violence against civilians. The continued construction and expansion of settlements as well as violence and acts of provocation will, if not reversed, render the two-State solution impossible.

It is therefore vital that the issue of settlements be addressed without delay. As clearly stated by the Council, settlements in occupied territory constitute a flagrant violation of international law and a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-State solution. Furthermore, in resolution 2334 (2016), the Security Council reiterated its demand that Israel immediately and completely cease all settlement activities.

The recent Israeli announcement of the construction of 3,000 new settlement units is worrying and contradicts Israel's commitment to the two-State solution. In line with resolution 2334 (2016), we also call on all States to distinguish between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied in 1967 in their dealings.

Ending the occupation will improve the lives of both Israelis and Palestinians as well as contribute to wider peace and security in the region. This must be our common goal. The Council must stand ready to assist, and we must spare no effort.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, I should like to thank you and your country for your initiative of holding a meeting of the Security Council to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Israeli occupation of Arab territory, particularly Palestinian and Syrian territory. I thank Mr. Ahmed Aboul-Gheit, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, with whom I have had the honour and privilege of working here in the United Nations in a previous capacity, and Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi for the very comprehensive briefings they delivered to the Council.

Today's meeting indeed represents an important fresh appeal for peace in the Middle East based primarily on resolving the core issue in the region, that is, the Palestinian question. Our discussions today have served to remind the world of the outlines for a resolution to this issue, in particular the need to put an end to the longest-standing occupation in the modern history of humankind, an occupation that began on 5 June 1967.

The sheer length of the occupation of the Palestinian territories and the decades-long absence of justice for the Palestinian people has led many to doubt the effectiveness of the international Organization, the international system as a whole and the Security Council in preserving and upholding the rights enshrined in the Charter of this House, as well as to deliver on the purposes that led to the creation of the United Nations, that is, the right of peoples to self-determination.

Some are questioning the effectiveness of addressing this issue within the United Nations going forward, saying that this hinders prospects for a genuine resolution or represents an attempt to impose a fait accompli on certain parties. We reiterate that the actions of the United Nations, including the Security Council, have never, since the very outbreak of the crisis, had the purpose of acting as an aggressor against, isolating or besieging a State or of detracting from its legality. Rather, the goal has been to complement the efforts made by the Organization for the past 70 years, since it decided to establish two States: Israel, which has been duly established, and the second, which we hope will soon enjoy full sovereignty over its own territory.

We have never asked the United Nations to, or hoped that it would, impose a solution, which would be unrealistic and impossible. We remain convinced that negotiations remain the best means of bringing about a just and lasting peace in the region.

Until a peace agreement is reached, our international Organization must remain the key organ with respect to, and the legitimate guarantor of, the inalienable legal rights of the Palestinian people and the parameters for the hoped-for negotiations.

Against that backdrop, we would like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his very comprehensive briefing this morning. We would also like to thank him for having presented the second report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), and his comments on the resolution's provisions and parameters. We have followed very closely and with a great deal of interest the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) and we would call upon both parties — once again, the Palestinian and Israeli sides — to listen very carefully to Mr. Mladenov, to be guided by him, to implement the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016) and to refrain from any unilateral measures, in particular the current unprecedented and illegal settlement activity we are seeing in the occupied Palestinian territory, which risks the prospects for the two-State solution. We would also recall the various Security Council resolutions that set out the key parameters agreed by the international community, in particular the two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 borders, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif.

We thank all those who are working on the humanitarian track to try mitigate the suffering of the Palestinian people in that territory, and indeed outside the borders of this territory, namely, those who are refugees. These humanitarian workers provide crucial services to successive generations of Palestinians who have known no other fate than the occupation and its nefarious practices. We particularly thank the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which, for a long time now, has provided services to millions of Palestinian refugees.

I call upon all current stakeholders concerend to work to overcome the financial crisis facing UNRWA via the options put forward by the Secretary-General in his report. Mitigating the suffering of the Palestinians under the boot of occupation is the very least that the international community should and could do currently. It would be a key step forward towards a definitive solution of the question, and failing to do so would have a very adverse impact.

In the past, some have tried to relieve the suffering of the Palestinian people through partial solutions, which is how they have tried to heal the wounds, but this has essentially been a cover for preserving the status quo. An attempt to preserve things as they currently stand will only have the impact of leading to greater division, discord and deterioration of the relationship between the Palestinian and Israeli peoples, and it will also lead to the further embedding of a de facto situation that jeopardizes a bright future for both parties, including the Palestinians. The right to live in safety is the right of all peoples in the region, including, we acknowledge, the right of the Israelis to live in peace within their duly agreed borders and in the

framework of a policy of good-neighbourliness with the States in the region, particularly the Arab States, which are Israel's neighbours.

But I am sure that members of the Council will also agree with me that the equality of rights of all peoples is the bedrock of justice and stability. All must enjoy full equality. It is impossible to imagine peace, security and prosperity being enjoyed by these people as long as the suffering of the Palestinian people continues.

A reduction in the levels of violence, which are very high in this conflict, even when compared with other conflicts in the region, means grappling with the importance of the Palestinian issue, really giving it is just due and understanding the risks that surround it. But those who believe that the Palestinian question is any way lesser than other conflicts in the region are mistaken in that belief. We believe that dealing with the Palestinian question is vital for the freedom of millions of people around the world, including in particular people in the region. It would also be upholding justice as it is truly to be seen on the global stage.

The injustices meted out for so long now against the Palestinian people are evidence of a most deeply rooted crisis and point to dysfunction in terms of the delivery of justice in this region. We must always keep this background in mind and remember that this has been the truth for some time now, as the Palestinian people have aspired to freedom and liberty for so long, having been forced out of their homes, faced with destruction, forced to live as prisoners, blockaded and separated from one another physically, given that their territory is physically divided between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which has become a ticking time bomb. We must bear in the mind the successive generations for whom this has been the plight, who have been imprisoned in this way throughout their lives without any political solution in sight that might allow them to dare to hope for a brighter future.

I do not want to touch upon, or give any weight to, the jumble of facts that we heard in today's meeting during the intervention by one of the speakers. That speaker ignored the injustice endured by the Palestinians and the seizure of their land during the period from 1948 to 1967, and even before the capture of the West Bank and Jerusalem. He also ignored the global movement that President Nasser led against colonialism all over the world, especially in Africa and in the Arab World.

We are not here to discuss historical facts full of conflicts. I am deeply surprised that the speaker ignored the fact that Egypt was the first country to conclude a peace treaty with Israel. I am also surprised at his boldness in justifying the occupation of others' land by force and at his support for the ongoing forced deportation, demolition of houses and crimes against humanity committed by Israel against Palestinians for decades. Regrettably, that extremist approach for justifying crimes is in itself capable of rekindling conflicts once again, despite all efforts towards peace.

The historic appeal launched by the Arab States remains the best proof that we are commited to the principles of peace as upheld by the international community, and we see it as the basis for ending the conflict and ushering in a land of peace. The most recent Arab League Summit reiterated the determination of the Heads of State and Government in the region to stand behind the Arab Peace Initiative, as they marked the fiftieth anniversary of the occupation of the Palestinian territory.

We would like to reiterate our congratulations to the United States Government for its determination to find a lasting solution to this issue. Egypt will support those to forge contacts with Israeli and Palestinian partners so that this laudable goal may be achieved.

Finally, it is high time for those who have a stake in this conflict to understand that the Israeli and Palestinian peoples share a common destiny and a common future, as they live side by side. The aspirations of the two peoples are for peace and security, and those aspirations can be met only by accepting the reality that the two peoples are neighbours and that they must therefore live side by side and coexist as two independent States living in peace — an Israeli State and a Palestinian State, whose capital would be Al-Quds Al-Sharif — on the basis of the 1967 borders.

Mr. Cardi (Italy): I would like to thank all the briefers for their contributions to today's debate.

Before delivering my statement, I wish to condemn in the strongest terms last Friday's terror attack in Jerusalem and the murder of the Israeli police officer Hadas Malka. We wish to extend our sympathy to the victims of the attack and to their families.

Fifty years have passed since the 1967 war. There must be no room for fatalism or resignation. On the country, this anniversary must reinforce our

collective resolve to work for a peace deal between Israelis and Palestinians. Regardless of the length of the historical controversy or the complexity of the geopolitical situation, where there is a will there is a way. We are encouraged by the level of engagement that the United States Administration is showing on the Middle East peace process, and we support its efforts. Any new approach that can lead to a just and lasting peace will be welcome, and Italy will contribute to it as long as it remains within the Oslo framework and is aimed at a two-State solution, which in our view is the only achievable possibility.

Although we maintain that peace must ultimately be attained through direct negotiations between the parties, we believe that the support of other actors is also of paramount importance. I refer in particular to the role of the Middle East Quartet, which has the ability to contribute effectively to creating new momentum for the peace process. In that regard, I should stress that the European Union, as a member of the Quartet, continues to consider the peace process one of its top priorities. Similarly, a credible path towards peace requires the direct involvement of the main Arab partners, which recently reaffirmed the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative as a strategic tool in helping to achieve peace between Israel and Palestine and bring about a future of cooperation and prosperity for the entire Middle East. Besides that, intensifying and accelerating those international diplomatic efforts is an integral aspect of resolution 2334 (2016), about which we have just received the second quarterly report of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process.

The resolution is very clear on violence. There is no justification whatever for any acts of violence or terror of any kind by anyone, nor for any incitement to such violence. All those in charge have a fundamental obligation to take a clear stance against any kind of violence, take all possible measures to prevent and end such violence or incitement to it and firmly condemn any attacks and their perpetrators. Provocations and inflammatory rhetoric should also be avoided by all concerned. With regard to settlements, we continue to believe that they are an obstacle to a two-State solution and that they give rise to further tensions and do not contribute to achieving peace.

Any diplomatic initiative relies on solid partners and their willingness to make bold decisions. That is why we support Palestine's President Mahmoud Abbas as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian leadership, which has the responsibility to engage constructively in order to advance peace negotiations. It is time for the Palestinian Authority to retake control of the Gaza Strip, where living conditions have deteriorated dramatically thanks to years of neglect, political clashes and conflict. In the process of restoring the whole of Palestine under a single democratic and legitimate authority, it is absolutely essential to ensure that the humanitarian imperative is taken into account.

In the light of that complicated environment, I would like to express Italy's deep appreciation for the hard work that has lately been done by the Special Coordinator and his staff, and by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and all United Nations entities in the region in general. I would once again like to stress the invaluable contribution that the United Nations has made to the lives of Palestinians in the region and to the security of Israel itself. In that spirit, we encourage all United Nations agencies operating in the area to further strengthen the vetting and accountability mechanisms relating to their own employees.

In conclusion, we firmly believe that the two-State vision remains the only achievable goal that can bring this long conflict to an end and the only one that will help the international community rally for the stabilization of the entire Middle East.

Mr. Seck (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): Like others, Mr. President, the Senegalese delegation would like to thank you for organizing today's monthly briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, and in particular for producing the concept note that has helped us to focus our discussion this morning. I would also like to thank today's briefers — Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General; Mr. Ahmed Aboul-Gheit, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States; and Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, member of The Elders — and to acknowledge the participation of Mr. Michael Doran of the Hudson Institute. The information they have given us sheds light on the enormous challenges that, sadly, are still to be overcome if we are to put the Middle East peace process back on track.

Seventy years after the General Assembly's adoption of resolution 181 (II) and 50 years after the occupation of the Palestinian territories began, we are

dealing with two entities in the Middle East. On the one hand we have a democratic and prosperous Israeli State, as the resolution envisaged, and on the other the people of Palestine, who are still seeking the fulfilment of their legitimate aspirations for an independent and viable State. Because the tensions have been exacerbated by the lack of tangible progress in the political process and the reality on the ground, we should recall Mr. Mladenov's report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), to the effect that the international community, and the Security Council first and foremost, has no alternative but to redouble its perseverance and creativity on the issue if we are to achieve a two-State solution. What is at stake is not only ensuring international peace and security but also enabling the forces of moderation to triumph in a context where extremism and terrorism are in the ascendant. We believe that an Israeli-Arab peace could be a powerful antidote to the plague of violent extremism and terrorism that is devastating the region and spilling over well beyond it. I would therefore like to reiterate our call to the parties to work resolutely on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions to reverse the negative trends on the ground that are threatening the possibility of a two-State solution. That is why there must be an end to the occupation and incitements to hatred and violence, wherever they originate, whoever are their perpetrators and whatever their motives. In that regard, we welcome the efforts of Israeli and Palestinian civil society aimed at building greater understanding between their peoples at a grass-roots level, with a view to using innovative ideas to contribute to the only valid solution, which is a two-State solution.

With regard to the explosive and intolerable situation in Gaza, including the persistent electricity problem, which affects 2 million people, half of them children, we urge the Palestinian political stakeholders to work to find a definitive solution with the help of the parties concerned. In an area that is already dealing with extraordinarily difficult humanitarian and socioeconomic issues, a lasting settlement of Gaza's infrastructure problems of water, sanitation and electricity must be achieved. We reiterate our support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which is continuing its vital work, particularly in the areas of education and health, for more than 5 million Palestinian refugees. We also call on the international community to urgently provide sufficient, predictable and ongoing financing to UNRWA.

The diplomatic initiatives undertaken by several countries — such as France, Egypt, Jordan and the Russian Federation — have now been joined by the efforts currently being made by the United States.

In Senegal's opinion, the reaffirmation of the Arab Peace Initiative at the most recent Summit of the League of Arab States was a considerable step forward. Senegal strongly encourages and supports all such initiatives.

Along the same lines, the forum marking 50 years of occupation that the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People is planning to organize in New York from 29 and 30 June is part of the efforts to achieve greater understanding among the parties and a peaceful negotiated political solution to this dispute.

In conclusion, I call on the international community, in particular the Security Council, to redouble its efforts with a view to returning to the spirit of the partition plan so that, like the Israelis, the Palestinians will also have a viable and sovereign State, on the basis of the 1967 borders.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Secretary-General of League of Arab States, Mr. Ahmed Aboul-Gheit; the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov; Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, member of The Elders; and Mr. Michael Doran, Senior Fellow at the Hudson Institute, for their briefings. The picture they have painted of the situation in both Israel and Palestine, and throughout the region, is very bleak.

In a regional environment marked by numerous and deadly crises, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict stands out for its longevity and its structural aspects. Beginning with its longevity, a few months from now we will commemorate the seventieth anniversary of the partition plan adopted by General Assembly via resolution 181 (II), which was immediately followed by the first Israeli-Arab war. This month is also the fiftieth anniversary of the June 1967 war and the occupation of the Palestinian territories and East Jerusalem, which came in its wake. We must not view this moment as a simple moment of remembrance or as an exercise in resignation, but rather it should compel us to look to the future and to breathe new life into our endeavours.

That is particularly true because the second hallmark of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is its structure. The lack of a solution to the conflict, which

is serious in and of itself, is also an ongoing threat to international security. As a result of the very serious nature of the conflict, its symbolic aspect and the place it has taken in the collective imagination, the scope of this unresolved conflict is structural and goes well beyond the territory of Israel and Palestine. Any escalation in the conflict risks destabilizing the region uncontrollably. That is why we cannot resign ourselves to a fake status quo, which conceals daily erosion on the ground and of the spirit. The goal of this path is clear: to put an end to the two-State solution as being a mirage in the desert, which would be a leap into the unknown and into the risk of a worse situation.

I believe we all share the view that the current painful situation has gone on for too long. It has gone on for too long for the Palestinians, who, for too long, have been deprived of their legitimate right to pursue statehood as a result of the occupation and see that prospect slipping further from their grasp and disappearing with the expansion of the settlement policy. The announcements at the beginning of the month of nearly 3,000 new housing units built in the Israeli settlements in the West Bank are part of a worrying trend and represent an increase of 70 per cent in settlement construction this year, as compared with last year, according to figures just published by the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics. With nearly 600,000 settlers in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, we are reaching the point of no return and we are faced with the question of the possibility of the two-State solution slipping away, without another viable solution. We must remember that the occupation is illegal under international law and makes achieving peace impossible.

This situation has gone on too long for the Israelis as well, because the prospects for a never-ending pursuit of occupation and colonization contradicts the democratic foundations of the State of Israel, because the full regional integration of Israel into the wider region is possible only once peace has been reached with the Palestinians and because violence flourishes in the void presented by the dearth of a political solution.

The attack that took place on Friday in Jerusalem, which claimed the life of a young female member of the Israeli police force and which France robustly condemned, is another tragic example of my point. The waves of violence that follow one after another, especially in Jerusalem, serve only to harden mutual defiance.

Yet, while the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is now the oldest of the conflicts that are ripping the Middle East apart, it is also the only one whose solution is known and widely shared within the international community. Despite the constant deterioration of the situation on the ground, the parameters of a future agreement have not changed: two States living in peace and security with contiguous, secure and recognized borders drawn on the basis of the 1967 demarcation lines and mutually agreed land swaps; with Jerusalem as the capital of both States; and with an agreed, realistic, just and equitable solution for Palestinian refugees.

There is no viable alternative to the two-State solution, neither for the Israelis nor for the Palestinians. The past 50 years have taught that the fates of these two peoples are intertwined, and that no one can sustainably fulfil their national aspirations by denying those of the other side.

Finally, I wish once again to publicly express France's concerns about the situation in the Gaza Strip. The ongoing humanitarian crisis in which this territory is entrenched has been aggravated by the blocking of the electricity supply, which has lasted for about two months. The inhabitants of Gaza today live with an average of two to four hours of electricity per day, and the energy crisis has serious consequences for the medical, sanitation and water treatment infrastructure facilities in particular. We must therefore take action to improve the situation in Gaza, particularly at the humanitarian level. All stakeholders must take responsibility to ensure that a lasting solution can be found in and for Gaza. This is urgent. If nothing is done, the ongoing tensions could lead to a new deadly conflict, like those that the Gaza Strip experienced three times in the past nine years. We cannot allow that to happen. Israel must therefore fulfil its responsibilities by alleviating the restrictions it imposes on the access to goods and people into and out of Gaza, which should be the precursor to a lifting of the blockade and which must be accompanied by robust security guarantees. It is also crucial that the Palestinians reach a reconciliation agreement, as we know that there will be no viable Palestinian State without Palestinian unity on the basis of the two-State solution.

France is a friend of both Palestinians and Israelis. That is why it can speak to them truthfully and repeatedly call on them to return to the negotiating table, and that is why my country will never give up.

We will continue to act in furtherance of that goal with our main partners.

In the region, the Arab Peace Initiative remains the essential framework for making peace with the Palestinians the first step towards the regional integration of Israel. We hope that the commitment of the United States Administration, through its renewed diplomatic effort, will help to restart the negotiation proces between Israelis and Palestinians. With our European Union partners, we stand ready to help the parties resume negotiations.

Fifty years of occupation means two successive generations of Palestinians and Israelis who have lived through the current conflict. The situation is both physically and psychologically devastating. It is time to put an end to it.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): Let me thank all the briefers for their valuable insights.

Year after year, members of the Security Council attest to the grim reality of a seemingly perpetual deadlock in the Middle East peace process. The composition of the Council changes, but the messages and signals heard around the table remain basically the same, amid little change in the overall situation. The reasons for this state of affairs are well known, so there is no need to turn to the name-and-shame game again. The recipe for breaking the stalemate is also known. Each side knows what exact steps are expected of them.

Yet again, we have to signal our strong concern about the continuous recurrence of violence. The terrorist attack that was thwarted on 16 June near the Damascus Gate in Jerusalem is a clear reminder of the very dangerous situation that we are currently facing. We condemn all manifestations of terrorism and praise the professionalism of the police forces that did not allow civilians to be hurt.

Time and again, the international community hears declarations of goodwill and readiness to explore peace options. However, what is missing is the follow-up to those declarations in the form of concrete actions. All available venues and opportunities must be exhaustively explored and attempted with a view to achieving greater security for Israel and Arab States.

We continue to believe that the Middle East peace process can and will be successful. The principle of a two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine coexisting in peace and security, remains valid despite well-known difficulties in overcoming the deadlock, where it happens to be at the moment.

We are certainly quite far from that goal. The parties have a long road ahead before they find a way to resolve the conflict. However, the good news is that for the last two months we have seen a number of high-profile visits to Israel and the Arab world. We hope that the groundwork that has been laid recently will provide the necessary impetus to restart the negotiation process. The key is for the parties to correctly interpret that message and seize the opportunity. One thing to avoid, however, is setting conditions and waiting for the other side to make unilateral concessions. Moves to reinvigorate the political track will have to be reciprocal.

In that context, we welcome the meeting held between top Palestinian and Israeli officials, during which the two sides agreed on a number of measures to improve the economic situation in the Palestinian territories, to enable more Palestinian development in Area C, to adjust Israeli enforcement policies and to expand the working hours of the Israeli-controlled Allenby Bridge border crossing between Jordan and the West Bank. Such steps benefit both parties, as they improve the atmosphere to facilitate the renewal of negotiations. We highly appreciate the renewed efforts of the United States to bring them together.

While we applaud those measures, we must not overlook the importance of focusing on a political solution. Otherwise, if the sides continue to dig in their entrenched positions, we will witness the repetition of the past five decades. It is hardly anybody's wish to see, in 50 years, in the Chamber, a repeat of today's meeting, albeit with different participants. To avoid such a scenario, we reiterate that the way forward lies in elaborating a workable Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement built on the relevant Security Council resolutions and the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002, the Quartet road map and the agreements previously reached between the parties.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): I would like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, Mr. Ahmed Aboul-Gheit and Mr. Michael Doran for sharing their insights and perspectives. They all spoke with passion — and rightly so — and their briefings were very useful. I am very appreciative.

We understand that there is one historic fact, as many have already mentioned, that gives context to

the briefing on the Middle East this month — that June 2017 marks 50 years since the 1967 Arab-Israeli conflict, with all of its implications. There is no doubt that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been one of the disputes at the core of the dangerous situation that essentially has defined the Middle East region for the past several decades

Today's meeting provides the Council an opportunity to reflect on efforts that have been made thus far and renew its commitment to helping to resolve this long-standing dispute. The Council and the international community cannot claim to have done enough in that regard. We have all failed.

For what it is worth, Ethiopia's position has been very clear — we fully support the goal of two States living side-by-side in peace and security as the only viable option to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. Unfortunately, peace has so far remained elusive, to the detriment of Israelis and Palestinians, as well as to the peace and stability of the Middle East region. Actions of both sides that run counter to the achievement of a negotiated peace have not only continued to increase frustration and mistrust but also undermine the very viability of the two-State solution.

We know full well that ultimately it is up to the two parties to achieve peace and resolve the conflict. It is therefore absolutely imperative that the two sides resume direct and meaningful negotiations in order to reach a comprehensive, just and lasting solution on the basis of mutual respect and the spirit of compromise that ensures Israel's security and Palestinian aspirations for Statehood. We believe the Council has a duty and responsibility to support and encourage that process with a view to ensuring the viability of the two-State solution and the achievement of lasting peace. The loss of the opportunity to realize the two-State solution would be a tragedy of historic proportions. The Council has the responsibility to make sure that does not happen.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my national capacity as representative of the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

I wish to thank the briefers for their presentations, including Mr. Ahmed Aboul-Gheit, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States and Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General. I also welcome to today's meeting Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, member of The Elders, the Secretary-General's Chef de Cabinet, as well as Assistant Secretary-General Miroslav Jenča.

Bolivia reaffirms its support of the self-determination of the Palestinian people and its right to a free, sovereign and independent State within the pre-1967 internationally recognized borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

Bolivia is constitutionally a pacifist State that promotes the right of peoples to cultivate and achieve peace as well as cooperation among the peoples of the world, and, in the most strident terms, condemns all forms wars of aggression as means of reolving disputes and conflicts between States. In that vein, we believe that the sole alternative for ensuring a just and lasting peace with regard to the conflict between Israel and Palestine is through direct negotiations, using the existing mechanisms enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and in compliance with the Organization's own resolutions.

Bolivia would like to take this opportunity to recall that, on 22 of November 1967, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 242 (1967). The resolution states that one of the fundamental principles for achieving peace in the Middle East is the withdrawal of the Israeli armed forces from the territories they have occupied since that time. Similarly, we would like to highlight that there have been various initiatives in recent years to try to resolve the situation through dialogue: the Camp David talks, led by then-President of the United States Jimmy Carter in 1978, the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991, the Oslo Accords in 1993, the Arab Peace Initiative in 2002, advanced by the League of Arab States, and, in 2003, the Quartet, made up of the United States, Russia, the European Union and the United Nations, drafted the road map, which laid the foundation for negotiations between Israel and Palestine and the recognition of the Palestinian State.

The issue, however, is not of a purely bilateral nature. The entire international community has voiced an opinion on this subject. In that regard, I would like to join the Heads of State and Government of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries in what they expressed in the declaration of the seventeenth Summit of Heads and State and Government of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries on the Island of Margarita, just a few months ago. I would like to recall that the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries brings together approximately

two thirds of the international community. This is a topic that does not only concern the Security Council but, as I said, the entire international community.

Allow me to read out the relevant paragraphs from the declaration.

(*spoke in English*)

> "The Heads of State or Government express their hope for genuine, rapid progress to be made to resolve the final status issues regarding the question of Palestine, namely, refugees, Jerusalem, settlements, borders, security, water and prisoners, underscoring that the just resolution of all of these issues is imperative for conclusion of a comprehensive and final peace agreement. They call for international efforts to support peace initiatives to overcome the obstacles that have repeatedly caused the failure of negotiations, stressing in this regard their grave concern about the critical political, economic, social, humanitarian and security situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, as a result of ongoing unlawful policies and practices by Israel, the occupying Power, as well as the negative impact on peace efforts. They express grave concern in particular at the dramatic deterioration of the situation in the Gaza Strip due to the Israeli military aggression in July and August 2014, which caused widespread human trauma and destruction amounting to a humanitarian disaster.
>
> "The Heads of State or Government condemn Israel's continuing military occupation of the Palestinian territory in breach of international law and United Nations resolutions. They condemn the continuing brutal Israeli military campaign against the defenceless Palestinian people, by which the occupying Power has continued to commit grave human rights violations and reported war crimes, including by use of excessive, indiscriminate force that over the years has killed and injured thousands of Palestinian civilians, including children, and has caused vast destruction of properties, infrastructure and agricultural lands. They also condemn illegal Israeli settlement activities, by which the occupying Power has continued to colonize the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and to forcibly displace Palestinian civilians, in grave breach of international law. They further condemn the provocations and incitement by groups of extremist settlers, including against the holy sites in occupied East Jerusalem and the vandalization of mosques and churches, which are fuelling tensions and religious sensitivities that risk further destabilization. They also condemn Israel's imposition of collective punishment on the Palestinian people by various illegal measures, particularly in the Gaza Strip, which has been subjected to an illegal Israeli blockade since 2007. The Heads of State or Government reiterate their demand that Israel, the occupying Power, immediately cease all such violations of international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law, and fully abide by its legal obligations, including under the Fourth Geneva Convention.
>
> "The Heads of State or Government stress the incompatibility of peace negotiations with Israeli colonization activities and demand an immediate cessation and reversal of all such illegal activities. They express deep concern about the extensive physical, economic and social devastation being caused by the Israeli settlements, wall and network of checkpoints,which are severing the Palestinian territory into separate areas, including several walled cantons, isolating East Jerusalem from the rest of the territory, forcibly displacing thousands of Palestinians from their homes, including many Bedouin families, particularly in the Jordan Valley, and completely destroying some communities. They stress that such actions gravely undermine the contiguity, integrity, viability and unity of the occupied Palestinian territory and jeopardize the prospects for physically achieving the two-State solution for peace on the basis of the 1967 borders. They recall, in this regard, the United Nations Register of Damage caused by the Construction of the Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and call for the speedy fulfilment of its mandate in order to redress the losses and suffering being endured by the Palestinian people as a result of the wall."

(*spoke in Spanish*)

This is a matter of global importance and is at the heart of the serious situation that the Middle East is experiencing. Bolivia believes it an inescapable duty to recall that for 50 years — half a century — a systematic occupation has been deployed in violation of international law. This meeting must be scene through

two prisms. First, it must first be seen as a call for peace and as support for all peace initiatives. Secondly, it must be seen as recognizing that, for 50 years — if we are talking just about the occupation — there has been a collective failure on the part of the Security Council and the international community, during which time we have failed more than 5 million Palestinian refugees. Today is the International Day of Refugees. Those children who arrived in the first refugee camps 50 years ago have seen their children and grandchildren born as refugees. The past 50 years have been marked by the failure of the international community because the Palestinian situation, the occupation and the sped-up construction of settlements show how we have acted according to double standards. In practice, there are resolutions that are not being complied with and about which we do not want to talk. It is a 50-year collective failure because, today, in this very Chamber, we have been alerted to the fact that we are on the brink of a humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. And there is a silence of complicity in the shadow of the impending tragedy.

It is a 50-year failure on the part of the Security Council because the construction of settlements has not only not ceased, but has increased, and our resolutions, including the latest recently adopted by the Security Council (resolution 2334 (2016)), have had no effect. For 50 years we have failed the Palestinian as well as the Israeli people because, without any doubt, both peoples want to live in peace and security. For 50 years the international community has similarly failed itself because we have not been able to comply with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

I now resume my functions as the President of the Council.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.7978

Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

7978th meeting
Tuesday, 20 June 2017, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr.Llorentty Solíz	(Bolivia (Plurinational State of))
Members:	China	Mr. Zhang Dianbin
	Egypt	Mr. Moustafa
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Italy	Mr. Lambertini
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Sadykov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Sweden	Mr. Skau
	Ukraine	Mr. Fesko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Mr. Klein
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli

Agenda

The situation in Burundi

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Burundi

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Burundi to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Tayé-Brook Zerihoun, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs; and His Excellency Mr. Jürg Lauber, Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations, in his capacity as the Chair of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission.

Mr. Lauber will be joining the meeting via video-teleconference from Geneva.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Zerihoun.

Mr. Zerihoun: I am thankful for this opportunity to brief the Security Council on developments in Burundi and the efforts of the United Nations and partners to help resolve the crisis in the country.

As members of the Security Council are aware, on 5 May, the Secretary-General appointed former President of Burkina Faso, Mr. Michel Kafando, as his new Special Envoy to lead and coordinate United Nations political efforts on Burundi, and to provide assistance to the mediation and facilitation led by the East African Community (EAC). Mr. Kafando visited New York from 30 May to 7 June for briefings and introductory meetings and consultations with Member States and the Secretariat. He will travel to the region shortly to meet with Burundian stakeholders, the East African Community Mediator and Facilitator, the African Union and other relevant actors. That engagement in the region will give us a better insight into the status of the political process, the assessment of regional leaders of the situation and on the way forward.

Since the most recent briefing to the Security Council on 9 March (see S/PV.7895), the situation in Burundi has remained volatile. With regard to the political process, after some delays, an EAC Summit of Heads of State and Government was held on 20 May in Dar es Salaam, at which President Museveni of Uganda was elected Chair of the Eastern African Community and the progress report and recommendations presented by EAC Facilitator, former President Mkapa, were approved. In the report, Mr. Mkapa highlighted nine points to, as he put it, clean the polluted political environment to allow for effective preparations for the 2020 elections, including confidence-building measures, inclusivity and political space, the return of refugees and exiled political leaders and the preservation of the Constitution and the Arusha Agreement.

Mr. Mkapa expressed concern over the slow progress in the dialogue and called on all parties to engage in good faith without preconditions. He also expressed concern over the Government's demand to repatriate the EAC-led dialogue to Burundi. Mr. Mkapa urged the leaders of the region to put their full weight behind his facilitation, including by providing appropriate funding for the process. The next round of consultations is scheduled to take place in Arusha in early July. The joint EAC-United Nations-Africa Union working group continues to meet regularly in Arusha, with the participation of a team from the Office of the Special Envoy in Burundi in support of the efforts of the Facilitator.

The security situation in Burundi remains fragile. Recent weeks have seen grenade attacks in the capital and repression and intimidation by security forces and associated groups. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as human rights non-governmental organizations, continues to report targeted arrests, arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment of real or perceived opposition members and supporters, as well as extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances.

Reports of incitement to hatred and violence have increased since April, with regular testimonies and video recordings of rallies by the Imbonerakure, the youth wing of the ruling Conseil national pour la défense de la démocratie-Forces pour la défense de la démocratie (CNDD-FDD). The dissemination of one such video on social media prompted the CNDD-FDD to issue a statement on 5 April condemning the inflammatory lyrics and attributing the events to influences outside the party. On 18 April, the High Commissioner for Human Rights issued a strong statement condemning the hateful rhetoric and incitement to violence.

The Government of Burundi has not resumed its cooperation with the Office of the High Commissioner since it was suspended in mid-October 2016. The High Commissioner has been awaiting a response from the Government regarding amendments to a proposal for a new memorandum of understanding. The Commission of Inquiry on the human rights situation in Burundi, established by the Human Rights Council, presented its second oral briefing on 15 June. The three commissioners regretted the lack of access to the country and the lack of cooperation by the Government of Burundi. The Commission of Inquiry has collected more than 470 testimonies of human rights violations allegedly committed in Burundi since 2015. The Commission will present its final report to the Human Rights Council this coming September.

In its final report, issued on 12 May, the Commission Nationale de Dialogue Inter-Burundais (CNDI) stated that the majority in Burundi supported a revision of the Constitution, the lifting of presidential term limits and changes to other provisions of the Arusha Agreement. Subsequently, President Nkurunziza appointed a constitutional review commission, which has yet to be established, with a six-month mandate to submit proposals to amend the Constitution. The CNDI report and the creation of the constitutional review commission were denounced by opposition parties, including the Conseil national pour le respect de l'Accord d'Arusha pour la paix et la réconciliation au Burundi et la restauration de l'état de droit. Civil society leaders in exile also condemned the move, which they consider a potential catalyst for unrest.

It is of great concern that those developments are taking place against the backdrop of widespread restrictions on civil liberties and political freedom. Implementing the proposed changes in the current climate will likely lead to an escalation of the crisis.

Since the Secretariat's previous briefing, the socioeconomic and humanitarian situations have also deteriorated. Three million people in Burundi are in need of humanitarian assistance. Nearly 2.6 million others experience acute food insecurity, with over 700,000 in need of emergency food assistance. Mass displacement continues due to natural hazards, food insecurity and sociopolitical factors. About 209,000 people are internally displaced. The number of Burundian refugees in neighbouring countries exceeds 400,000. Humanitarian actors have scaled up their response, but have yet to reach the capacity required to meet emerging life-saving needs. The Government has eased some restrictions on humanitarian access. The humanitarian community has appealed for $73.7 million to assist a third of the estimated 3 million people in need. The appeal is currently funded at only 35 per cent, and the humanitarian community urgently needs additional financial support.

The International Monetary Fund projects a growth rate of 0 per cent and an inflation rate of more than 12 per cent in 2017. Severe fuel and electricity shortages further disrupt business and social activities and drive up prices. Blackouts, lasting several days at a time, have reportedly caused an uptick in criminal activity in some areas.

The Secretariat remains fully committed to assisting the people of Burundi and supporting the EAC-led dialogue process. Regional actors and international partners need to put their full weight behind the EAC-led dialogue and continue to press for the implementation of confidence-building measures to help create conditions conducive to the holding of an inclusive and credible political dialogue.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Zerihoun for his briefing to the Council.

I now give the floor to Mr. Lauber.

Mr. Lauber: I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to brief the Security Council from the perspective of the Chair of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC). As usual, my statement has been subject to consultation with, and approval by, the members of the configuration, including the country concerned, Burundi.

Let me start by welcoming the two appointments just mentioned by the Assistant Secretary-General: those of Mr. Michel Kafando as Special Envoy of the Secretary-General and of Mr. Garry Conille as United Nations Resident Coordinator in Burundi. We also acknowledge the rapid accreditation by the Government of Burundi. We furthermore welcome Mr. Kafando's visit to Burundi, scheduled for the end of the month, to make the first contact with the national authorities in Bujumbura. I very much look forward to the cooperation between Mr. Kafando, Mr. Conille and the configuration.

One of the key events that marked the period since the previous Council briefing on Burundi (see S/PV.7895) was, as the Assistant Secretary-General just

mentioned, the East African Community (EAC) Heads of State Summit on 20 May in Dar-es-Salaam. The Summit demonstrated once again the importance of regional engagement. Mr. Yoweri Museveni, President of Uganda, now assumes the chairmanship of the EAC, and he reiterated his personal commitment to the EAC-led Burundi mediation. He also called for a resumption of socioeconomic cooperation with Burundi.

Furthermore, the Summit provided clarity about the direction of the mediation process. Mr. Benjamin Mkapa, EAC Facilitator and former President of Tanzania, presented a proposal on the way forward that outlines a series of steps towards overcoming the current situation and creating the necessary preconditions for peaceful and democratic elections in 2020. The EAC Heads of State welcomed that proposal, and I hear similar positive reactions from Burundi's major socioeconomic partners.

Political dialogue, security and human rights, as well as socioeconomic development, are closely interlinked, and it is important to see progress in all three areas. In the political area, the plan outlined by President Mkapa, and endorsed by the EAC Summit on 20 May, offers a clear pathway towards progress. The inter-Burundian dialogue, led by the Commission nationale de dialogue inter-Burundais, as well as recent initiatives by the Ombudsman, should evolve in synchronization with the EAC-led process. A greater international presence can considerably contribute to improvements in the area of human rights and security. Whereas the Government of Burundi has signalled its readiness to accept a continued presence of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Burundi, the modalities of the cooperation between the Government and OHCHR remain to be agreed. I furthermore hope that the rest of the 200 agreed military and human rights observers of the African Union (AU) can soon be deployed to Burundi and complement those AU observers who are already in the country. The monitoring and reporting of both institutions, in cooperation with the host Government, have the potential to contribute to a further stabilization of the situation.

Besides these two areas, we must not neglect the socioeconomic and humanitarian situation. In recent months, the PBC Burundi configuration focused in particular on socioeconomic development, which was a key aspect in the consultations that I held in Burundi and Tanzania from 27 to 31 March. A written report on the outcome of that visit was submitted to the PBC and the Security Council in April. During the visit, I co-hosted a socioeconomic meeting in Bujumbura together with His Excellency Alain Aimé Nyamitwe, Burundi's Minister of External Relations and International Cooperation, and Mr. Bo Viktor Nylund, the then United Nations Resident Coordinator ad interim.

On the one hand, this working lunch provided for an open exchange on the current socioeconomic and humanitarian challenges and on the ongoing national and international responses in the three priority sectors — food security, health and education — that had been identified during the socioeconomic consultations in Geneva in November 2016. On the other hand, the meeting was an opportunity for the Government and its United Nations partners to jointly reflect on modalities of cooperation.

At the end of that meeting, I agreed with the Foreign Minister and the United Nations Resident Coordinator ad interim to continue the socioeconomic dialogue in the format of a joint retreat to be held with the Government and its main international partners in Bujumbura in July.

On 21 April, I travelled to Washington, D.C., where I met Burundi's Minister of Finance, Budget and Privatization, as well as representatives of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. They updated me on the current socioeconomic situation and all welcomed the idea of organizing a retreat between the Government and key multilateral partners in Bujumbura.

The PBC Burundi configuration has now started to prepare that socioeconomic retreat, which is tentatively scheduled for 11 July. The retreat will allow the Government and its international partners to share updated macroeconomic and socioeconomic data, inform one another about ongoing humanitarian and socioeconomic assistance, and discuss the modalities of cooperation. We hope that the participants will agree on concrete steps to make cooperation more efficient and overcome existing obstacles.

I am glad that Burundi's major bilateral partners, EAC Facilitator President Mkapa and the representatives of the EAC member States, also see value in continuing the socioeconomic dialogue. Of course, and as mentioned before, this dialogue cannot take place in a vacuum. The political dialogue in Arusha and the socioeconomic conversations are complementary. The

socioeconomic track can inform the Arusha process, and vice versa.

The PBC Burundi configuration remains a platform where actors from all three areas — political dialogue, human rights and security, and the socioeconomic situation — can compare notes and exchange information on and assessments of the developments in Burundi as we jointly, together with the Government of Burundi, strive for progress in all three areas. I will gladly inform the Council about the outcome of the planned socioeconomic retreat and the further engagement of the configuration.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Lauber for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me to begin by thanking the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Tayé-Brook Zerihoun, and the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) Burundi configuration, our colleague Ambassador Jürg Lauber, for their respective briefings.

Uruguay reiterates its concern at the current state of affairs in Burundi, which is still picking up the pieces from the 2015 electoral crisis and continues to face a host of further challenges, in particular serious and persistent violations and abuses of human rights, an economic slowdown and the mass displacement of its population.

Uruguay notes with interest the convening of the East African Community summit on 20 May, at which the countries of the region reach reiterated their commitment to finding a peaceful solution to the crisis in Burundi. Moreover, during the summit, the facilitator of the inter-Burundian dialogue, Mr. Benjamin Mkapa, presented a road map containing a series of steps aimed at ending the current stalemate in the political process and promoting the necessary conditions for transparent, inclusive and peaceful elections in 2020.

Uruguay therefore urges the countries in the region to support Burundi in a united and coordinated manner. Similarly, we urge the Burundian parties to resume dialogue in good faith so as to ensure the implementation of the road map proposed by facilitator Mkapa on the basis of respect for the Arusha Agreement.

Given the deteriorating human rights and security situation in the country, Uruguay is concerned that currently, for various reasons, the cooperation between Burundi on the United Nations is at a low ebb. We are particularly concerned by the suspension of cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the further problems encountered in the relationship between the authorities and the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General in the country.

We believe that it is essential to restore mutual trust between the Government of Burundi and the United Nations system, which would make it possible to pool our efforts to ensure the stability and development of the country and the well-being of its people. Here we advocate for fresh engagement between the United Nations and Burundi, which can take the guise of specific actions such as the concluding of an agreement for the renewal of the activities of OHCHR in Burundi.

By the same token, almost one year after the adoption of resolution 2303 (2016), we call upon the Government of Burundi to acquiesce to the deployment of human rights observers and military experts by the African Union as well as to the deployment of the United Nations police component, as provided for in the resolution.

To conclude, we would like to express Uruguay's support to the recently appointed Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Burundi, Mr. Michel Kafando, and we wish him every success in his role. We eagerly await the outcome of his visit to Burundi at the end of this month. We also pay tribute to the work of the Chair of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, Ambassador Jürg Lauber, for his unstinting efforts to build peace in Burundi.

We also look forward to the outcome of the socioeconomic retreat that is set to take place next month, which we understand will be a crucial forum for the Government of Burundi and its international partners to discuss various modalities for cooperation.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Burundi.

Mr. Shingiro (Burundi) (*spoke in French*): As this is the first time that I am taking the floor under your presidency, Sir, I should like at the outset to congratulate you personally as well as your country, Bolivia, on your well-deserved accession to the presidency of the

Security Council. You may, of course, count on the full support and cooperation of Burundi throughout your presidency.

I should like to take this opportunity to share with the Council the latest developments in my country at the political, security and human rights levels and the efforts undertaken by the Government to normalize relations with its partners and the United Nations.

As regards the political situation, I should like to recall that, following 26 April 2015, the Government of Burundi began a process of inter-Burundian dialogue, with the facilitation of both the Commission nationale de dialogue inter-Burundais (CNDI) and that of the East African Community (EAC).

On the domestic level, the Inter-Burundi dialogue has made significant progress. On 12 May, the Commission nationale de dialogue inter-Burundais submitted its final report to the appropriate parties. Since its inception, it has spent about 600 hours in listening and exchange sessions with approximately 26,000 Burundian citizens in the 18 provinces and 119 communes of the country. The CNDI also met with organized groups — such as women's groups, youth groups, trade unions, accredited political parties, religious groups, journalists, students, economic actors, police officers, civil society as a whole and so on. In addition, the Commission met with representatives of the East African Community Legislative Assembly, the diplomatic and consular corps, the international organizations present in Burundi and, of course, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and the Burundian diaspora living in such Scandinavian countries as Norway, Denmark and Sweden.

At the regional level, the East African Community is working hard to assist Burundians in finding lasting solutions to the political consequences of the 2015 crisis. Those consultations are on the right track despite some pending challenges. The Government of Burundi remains very committed to the process of political dialogue. Recently, consultations at the highest level between Burundi and mediators have been stepped up and will continue to move forward.

Also at the regional level, upon the initiative of the Chair of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, the Permanent Representatives of the countries of the region, together with the Permanent Representative of South Africa, whose country has played an important role in the inter-Burundi peace process, met here in New York for a working lunch on 31 May. At the end of the meeting, consensus was reached on the following items.

First, the people concerned and the region must retain their leadership role in the management of the situation in Burundi. The international community's contribution should be limited to providing assistance. Secondly, the social and economic aspects must continue to receive the attention of Burundi's development partners. Just as the recent EAC Summit did, the Permanent Representatives called for the lifting of the economic sanctions on Burundi that affect vulnerable people. My delegation hopes that this passionate appeal from the region will be heeded. Thirdly, there was also consensus on the fact that the two dialogue processes — the internal and external processes — complement one another; they do not compete. They need to benefit on an equal footing from the attention of our partners, because they constitute the very benchmarks for the road map for peaceful elections in 2020.

The culture of dialogue in Burundi goes beyond those two processes. In recent months, the Burundian Ombudsman has increased the number of meetings among all the parties involved in the peace process, in the form of retreats and what we call political coffeehouses. The next retreat is scheduled for tomorrow — 21 to 23 June. This internal dynamic is supported at the highest level by the Head of State and should be supported by our partners as well.

With respect to security, the shared view is that security in Burundi is good throughout the territory, except in a few isolated cases. The fact that a grenade is thrown once every six months is not a cause for concern about security in Burundi just because we see such occurrences elsewhere. The country as a whole is calm, with citizens and foreigners residing in Burundi calmly going about their business.

There is no longer a political crisis in Burundi in the true sense of the term. Let me explain this to you, Mr. President. A political crisis is the absence of institutions or institutional paralysis or general insecurity in a country. Burundi has none of that today. The democratically elected institutions function normally from top to bottom. Security in the country is real. We are today managing the political and economic consequences of the 2015 crisis through dialogue about those consequences and by mobilizing domestic

resources and winning back the trust of partners so that we can address the economic consequences of the crisis. That is what is at stake.

This return to normal security in the country has been confirmed by several regional and subregional organizations, such as the East African Community, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the African Bar Association and the African Union. Following the return to peace, several regional meetings, including that of the East African Standby Force, in February 2017, the ECA Health Ministers meeting, in March 2017, and the eighth ECA Petroleum Conference and Exhibition, from 7 to 9 June 2017, have been held successfully and peacefully in Bujumbura. This reflects the region's confidence in the Burundi authorities. We are also preparing to host the fifth annual ECA Secretary General's Forum for Private Sector, Civil Society and Other Interest Groups, from 22 to 23 June 2017, and the Summit of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, in October 2017.

In the area of human rights, which I think is the most sensitive topic for everyone, Burundi, like other nations in the world, is continuing to make efforts to promote and ensure the protection of human rights. It is an ongoing battle for everyone, including for the Government of Burundi, which is committed to fighting for the protection of human rights so as to meet the remaining challenges in this area. In order to achieve that end, it would be best not to point fingers, but rather to adopt a cooperative approach. We must definitively foreswear politicization, selectivity, bias and subjectivity in the process of human rights protection. Only international cooperation and a mutually beneficial partnership that respects the foundational pillars of all States, namely, sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence, can contribute to the genuine protection of human rights in Burundi and elsewhere. In that regard, I would like to cite an authority from a State that is a member of the Security Council who said only a few days ago that "if our human rights laws get in the way" of their leaders' ability to ensure their citizens' security, they "will change the law so we can do it" in order to adapt to the current situation. That may be an approach that works for other countries dealing with terrorism and serious crime as well.

It is no longer even an open secret that everything that has happened in Burundi since 2015 is the result of a meticulously conceived plan to destabilize Burundian institutions by known outside elements. One example of this, among many others, is the European Union contract documents assisting the financing and evacuation of the key players — who recently fled — in the 2015 insurgency that led to the failed coup d'état of 13 May 2015. The numerous Council members that do not have a hidden agenda where Burundi is concerned have the right to understand that reality. On top of that, a humanitarian war is being planned behind Burundians' backs, as if the recent successive failures of this type of interference disguised as humanitarian assistance in Africa and elsewhere have not been lessons enough in ending such aggressive behaviour for good.

Basically, every possible strategy has been employed since 2014 to effect regime change in Burundi. The plan to destabilize the country was carried out in several stages, each supported by a plan B in case of failure. It all began with the creation of some confusion in interpreting the Constitution, and thereby flouting the authority of Burundi's constitutional court and the East African Court of Justice, which had validated the legitimacy of the candidacy of Mr. Pierre Nkurunziza, President of the Republic of Burundi. The second phasewas to be a continuation of the experiments in mob-led regime change in black Africa that, as the Council is aware, had just succeeded in Burkina Faso and in some countries of the Maghreb. Thanks to Burundians' unity and patriotism, the mob insurgency failed.

The destabilizing machinery then switched to plan B through its planning and financing of the coup of 13 May. Like the first plan, the coup d'état failed miserably, thanks to the overwhelmingly patriotic majority of the forces of law and order. The third plan was to use both internal and external actors to create death squads, whose mission was to conduct targeted killings in both camps with the goal of dividing Burundians and getting them to retreat back into themselves. After several months of such sinister efforts, the regime-change machinery once again came up against Burundians' unity and decided to move to a fourth stage, still going on today, of a campaign demonizing and slandering Burundi and its elected leaders, this time through the wholesale politicization of the human rights situation in Burundi.

Biased, politically motivated resolutions and reports on the human rights situation in Burundi have been regularly adopted in Geneva at the urging of the same external actors. Commissions of inquiry have been created in their wake and are putting out reports from afar, without ever setting foot in Burundi. As far

as we are concerned, a fact-finding report on the human rights situation produced without evidence gathered on the ground and based solely on the testimony of refugees and information collected from social networks is pure theatre, aimed at achieving the regime change that the same well-known axis desires so much. Besides that, having been a refugee myself, I do not know a single refugee anywhere in the world who speaks well of the politics of his country of origin. That applies all the more when the refugees being interviewed are the same people who have taken part in incursions into Burundi after undergoing military training in a neighbouring country that United Nations experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo have exposed, as the Security Council well knows. So claiming to produce a report on a country's human rights situation based solely on refugee testimony is simply all the more likely to diminish that mandating body's credibility.

I should also point out that the avalanche of biased and politically motivated reports that have emerged since 2015 with the intention of damaging my country only add fuel to the fire and help to destabilize Burundi rather than pacify it. The crisis that some external actors continue to speak of is now more artificial than real, and it is therefore high time that the political and diplomatic harassment that Burundi has endured since 2015 came to an end and gave way to cooperation. To the outside forces that continue to harass the Burundian people directly or by proxy, I say that Burundi's sovereignty, unity and dignity are priceless. Burundi will never give in to unjust pressure from those who want to wrest from it the three values that are the very foundation of our nation. Burundi may be a small country, but it is also a great nation that treasures its sovereignty and dignity.

With regard to cooperation, this time with the United Nations, the Government is working to restore peaceful relations with its development partners in a spirit of mutually beneficial and respectful partnership. It was in that spirit that Burundi gave quick assent to the appointment of Mr. Michel Kafando as the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General and has also just confirmed his first visit to Burundi so that he can meet directly with the national authorities. The Government of Burundi stands ready to cooperate fully with him in full respect for the principles and values enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. In its eagerness to restore the trust that had been lost among some of its partners, Burundi also recently swiftly approved the appointment of the new United Nations Development Programme country representative and Resident Coordinator of United Nations agencies with a view to contributing to its sustainable development efforts.

The process of negotiating a consensus on a new host country agreement that will enable cooperation to be resumed between the Government of Burundi and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights is following the normal course and should be finalized in the near future with the consent of both parties. Keeping the Office's presence in Burundi is therefore a foregone conclusion and should no longer be a major concern. The only thing left to do is to finalize the host country agreement.

Still with its contribution to United Nations activities in mind, Burundi continues to participate actively in peacekeeping operations in other countries, with approximately 6,500 troops on the ground, mainly in Somalia and the Central African Republic. Our participation in peacekeeping around the world is one way we can give back to the international community and the United Nations, which have always supported us at difficult times in our history. And it follows that Burundi also expects its partners to make reciprocal efforts to ensure peace.

In conclusion, I would like to briefly share with the Council the three challenges that Burundi is currently facing.

First, it is clear that the economy is Burundi's greatest challenge. Poverty continues to fuel political instability because politicians manipulate young people who are frustrated by the lack of guarantees for a better future. Burundi, like other countries, is trying to implement the United Nations 2030 Agenda and the African Union's Agenda 2063. Political discussions should not take the place of discussions on economic and social aspects. Everything must be done in parallel with the three pillars of the United Nations, which constitute our foundation. I welcome the new approach of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, which since November 2016 has tended to emphasize socioeconomic recovery.

The second challenge is the return of refugees. The Government of Burundi has undertaken a wide-ranging awareness-raising campaign for refugees to encourage their voluntary return. Local administrations also have a duty to supervise the land and property of those who have left, so as to avoid conflict when they return. As a result of those efforts and renewed peace, I emphasize

that 156,000 refugees, which no non-governmental organization or foreign actor has spoken about and which include some political party leaders, recently returned to their homes. The Head of State has just asked the Ombudsman of Burundi to continue awareness-raising efforts for refugees and non-violent political actors for them to return to their country in preparation for the 2020 elections.

As you know, Mr. President, the repatriation of refugees is an indication of subregional stability. It is recognized that, some of those who fled their country, whether for economic reasons or because of rumours of an impending war, were recruited, trained, supervised and then entered the stillborn ranks of rebel movements against Burundi, in flagrant violation of the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees and other international laws, as well as the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, of 24 February 2013.

Our third and last challenge is national reconciliation. The need for a successful conclusion to the process of national reconciliation through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is extremely important for us Burundians. The Burundian people must learn about their history before definitively turning the page of their painful past. In that respect, we advocate once again for maintaining support for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which has a major role to play in seeking truth, fixing broken hearts and genuinely rewriting our history, which has always been deliberately falsified.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 3.55 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.7979

Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

7979th meeting
Wednesday, 21 June 2017, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Llorentty Solíz	(Bolivia (Plurinational State of))
Members:	China	Mr. Shen Bo
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Italy	Mr. Cardi
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Sweden	Mr. Skau
	Ukraine	Mr. Herasymenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mrs. Carrión

Agenda

Peace and security in Africa

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Peace and security in Africa

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Mali to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2017/522, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by France.

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Bolivia (Plurinational State of), China, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Russian Federation, Senegal, Sweden, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and Uruguay

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2359 (2017).

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): France welcomes the unanimous adoption of resolution 2359 (2017). Through this important and, in many ways, seminal text, the Security Cuncil expresses its full support for the Force conjointe du G5 Sahel, established by the Group of Five States for the Sahel (G-5) to combat the terrorist threat they face, which knows no borders. The resolution calls on the entire international community to provide logistical, operational and financial assistance to the G-5 States, in particular via the swift holding of a donors conference. Lastly, via the resolution, the Council expresses its determination to meet on a number of occasions in the months to come in order, among other things, to consider possible measures to be taken to support the deployment of the G-5 Joint Force France. France will make that a priority during its presidency of the Security Council in the month of October.

The resolution we just adopted provides robust and decisive support to a major African initiative, endorsed and authorized by the African Union, that seeks to combat terrorism. The resolution makes a contribution to the strategic approach to encourage the willingness of African countries to take responsibility for the security of their continent. It is fully in line with the need — promoted by the Secretary-General — to bolster the partnership between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations, especially in Africa.

The Joint Force will support and complement the efforts of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) by operating on territory thus far not covered and by conducting counter-terrorism activities, which does not fall within the mandate of MINUSMA. By contributing to securing the region, it will also enable MINUSMA to focus on its priority tasks and will facilitate the implementation of its mandate. It will also operate in coordination with the French forces of Operation Barkhane, with which operational contacts have already been established on the ground.

For France and for Europe, peace and security in the Sahel constitutes a crucial priority that has a direct impact on our own national security. The 4,000 French troops deployed in the region at the request of the G-5 countries are pursuing their counter-terrorism operations by supporting the forces of the G-5 States. Twenty of them have laid down their lives in the process. At a time when terrorism strikes everywhere throughout the world, we cannot leave the Sahel to become a new haven for terrorist organizations from all over the world. It is our collective security that is at stake in the Sahel, not just the security of the G-5 countries. That reality means that we must act together and to coordinate. It is for that reason in particular that the G-5 States have turned to the Security Council. France deeply believes that the Security Council has a moral and political responsibility to provide unanimous support to our African partners, who are coming together to combat the terrorist threat, in particular in the Sahel. That shows just how important our vote today is.

The Council has provided steadfast support to the building of African capacity to respond to crises. It has also been a steadfast supporter of African States and organizations in their determination to take their destiny and security into their own hands. Providing clear support to the G-5 Sahel Joint Force is therefore above all a demonstration of coherence to our African partners and friends. It is also a matter of promoting an ambitious vision, namely, that of a strategic partnership with our African friends.

African States and organizations are increasingly assuming responsibility for deploying their own forces to fight directly against terrorism, thereby complementing United Nations peacekeeping operations. We wish to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the sacrifices that they have made for their own security, and also for ours. We commend this profound and positive development with a view to guaranteeing international peace and security. It is our collective responsibility, and the responsibility of the United Nations in particular, to support them tangibly in their efforts at a political level — but also at a financial level, as often they lack the necessary resources to effectively combat terrorism. France intends to step up its efforts to support African States and organizations in their determination to take responsibility for their own security and to respond to the terrorist threat.

Let us make no mistake: resolution 2359 (2017) is a seminal text. Not only is the Security Council providing strong, decisive support for the mobilization of our African partners in the struggle against terrorism through the G-5 Sahel Joint Force, but the resolution also embodies a strategic vision, that of a partnership with our African partners in the field of peace and security, of which we are opening a new chapter today. Rest assured of France's determination to foster the profound, irreversible impetus that the Security Council has generated today in its relationship with Africa.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Mali.

Mr. Konfourou (Mali) (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the Group of Five States for the Sahel (G-5) here in New York, the Ambassadors of which are right behind me, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for giving us this opportunity to take the floor on the occasion of the adoption of resolution 2359 (2017), concerning the Force conjointe du G5 Sahel, endorsed by the African Union.

I wish to convey to the members of the Security Council and to Secretary-General António Guterres the gratitude of His Excellency Mr. Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, President of the Republic of Mali and Acting President of the G-5 Sahel, on behalf of his peers of Burkina Faso, Mauritania, the Niger and Chad, for this important resolution, which the Council has just adopted unanimously.

There is no need to highlight the importance of this Force for the stability of our shared space and for the hope that it raises in our populations, which have been sorely tried by transnational organized crime, which, if not quickly contained, will strike a heavy blow at the very foundation of our States. The creation of the Joint Force is therefore part of the shared will of our Heads of State to pool their efforts and their means to effectively combat terrorism, organized crime and trafficking in persons, which nowadays is a true threat to international and regional peace and security. Resolution 2359 (2017) is a clear message of the firm stand of the international community against terrorist groups, which came together recently to further destabilize our subregion. It is also a message of sthe international community's solidarity with the peoples of the Sahel.

We place great hope in the rapid deployment of the Joint Force, which is called to put an end to criminal activities along the shared borders of our countries. Moreover, the Joint Force will also contribute to the creation of conditions that will enable the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), as the Ambassador of France just highlighted, to fully carry out its mandate. It will create an environment that will foster the proper implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, which emanated from the Algiers process, and that is conducive to the carrying out of infrastructure projects of the G-5 Sahel Priority Investment Programme.

I thank Council members for having understood that the G-5 Sahel Joint Force is not just another additional or superfluous force. Its operations will complement those of the forces already present in the region, that is, the defence and security forces of our respective countries, the French Operation Barkhane and MINUSMA. Coordination mechanisms between all those forces are provided for in the strategic concept of operations of the Joint Force.

Along with the security aspect, I must highlight that the G-5 Sahel Joint Force gives high priority to issues of development, good governance and the resilience of populations. The establishment of the Joint Force therefore expresses the will of the Heads of State of the region to create the conditions for development, security and lasting peace, as we are convinced that there can be no lasting peace without development, and vice versa.

I can assure the Council that the operations of the Joint Force will be respectful of gender, of human rights and of international humanitarian law. For all of the reasons I have just mentioned, I call for increased and more consistent support from our bilateral and multilateral partners in order to mobilize the necessary means for the effective operationalization and the efficient functioning of the Joint Force. In that regard, I welcome the contribution already announced by the European Union, and I am pleased that the resolution provides for the upcoming holding of a conference to mobilize and coordinate contributions from bilateral and multilateral partners.

We wish to move quickly because criminal groups will not wait. I can already assure members of the complete commitment of all of our States to rise to the challenge of implementing this resolution. Our Heads of State are ready to quickly operationalize the Force with our own resources as we wait for the support of the international community.

With that in mind, an Extraordinary Summit of the Heads of State of the G-5 Sahel, with the participation of the President of France, is scheduled for 2 July in Bamako. Major General Didier Dacko has been appointed Commander of the G-5 Sahel Joint Force. He is already in place to establish the force headquarters, and the battalions of each member State are being created with the means available.

Ending as I began, I reiterate the infinite gratitude of the States of the G-5 Sahel to each Council member for this historic and important decision, and also for their sense of commitment, which has made it possible to arrive at this outcome.

The meeting rose at 10.20 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.7980

Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

7980th meeting
Wednesday, 21 June 2017, 10.20 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Llorentty Soliz	(Bolivia (Plurinational State of))
Members:	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mrs. Guegen
	Italy	Mr. Lambertini
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Bitimov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Sweden	Mr. Skau
	Ukraine	Mr. Herasymenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mrs. Carrión

Agenda

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2017/508)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2017/508)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Afghanistan, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Spain and Turkey to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Her Excellency Ms. Joanne Adamson, Deputy Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/508, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security.

I now give the floor to Mr. Yamamoto.

Mr. Yamamoto: The months since my most recent briefing (see S/PV.7896) have been unusually tense in Afghanistan. The deteriorating security situation has brought to the surface underlying political tensions. At the same time, the willingness of the Government to take steps towards peace was demonstrated by its successful holding in Kabul of a meeting on regional peace and security earlier this month, as well as the continuous implementation of the political agreement with the former insurgent group Hizb-i Islami (Gulbuddin). But without enhanced efforts by the National Unity Government to increase political inclusiveness, strengthen accountability and improve the Government's credibility, particularly in the security sector, we are likely to face more crises in an increasingly fragile environment. The events of the early morning of 20 June, when the Government's attempt to remove the final protesters resulted in violence, is a reminder of the need for caution, calm and unity.

The most recent security and political crisis was sparked by a terrorist bombing in Kabul's centre on 31 May. That was followed by large street demonstrations protesting growing insecurity that turned violent, followed by a suicide attack at the funeral of one of those killed in the demonstrations. Chief Executive Abdullah, Foreign Minister Rabbani and other senior political officials were near the blasts at the funeral but were thankfully unhurt. The political fault lines that emerged are increasingly ethnic-based, which is particularly worrying at a time when the Islamic State is attempting to provoke sectarian strife in the country through attacks against Shia Muslims.

During the anti-Government demonstrations on 2 June, we at the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) conducted extensive outreach to leaders on all sides, particularly leaders of political movements who were considering joining the protests. We urged for restraint, warned of the negative consequences that the loss of control would entail for everyone and requested them to give time to allow their grievances to be addressed without violence. Coupled with the intensive efforts by the Government and members of the diplomatic community, the immediate risk of escalation was defused. We are grateful for the subsequent acknowledgement from the Government and political leaders outside the Government that UNAMA's efforts contributed to calming the situation. I remain concerned, however, that, without changes in governance practices, we are likely to face future crises that might be more difficult to contain.

What is the root of the problem? There have been indications, since last summer, that Afghanistan's broad political consensus is fraying. In recent months, a growing number of political factions, some of whom were formerly part of the National Unity Government as well as a younger generation of political forces, has begun to criticize and demand reforms be made to the Government. They argue that it is not sufficiently consultative or inclusive. The Government, on the other hand, claims that opposition groups block important reforms and stoke tensions by calling for the Government to be replaced. Each side accuses

the other of acting against the national interests. It appears to me undeniable that those perceptions have contributed to the tensions that characterize today's political environment. The existence of opposition is natural in any political scene, but the amount of mistrust is growing, while some increasingly resort to uncompromising slogans and statements capable of fuelling further violent protests. Efforts at inclusiveness and building consensus for political stability are critical.

The suicide bomb of 31 May exploded just outside the restricted diplomatic enclave in the middle of Kabul. It took more than 90 lives and injured approximately 500 people — all of whom were Afghans. While there were no serious international casualties, a number of diplomatic facilities, including several United Nations buildings, were badly damaged. Some Embassies have had to evacuate staff while their facilities are repaired. Despite those realities, it is imperative that the attack not be allowed to undermine international support for Afghanistan, including development and economic assistance. The international community must not be intimidated nor succumb to the terrorists.

The Government's ability to hold a high-level meeting of the Kabul process on regional peace and security in Kabul on 6 June, with the participation of 24 States and organizations, demonstrated its resilience and the determination of the international community to maintain its support for Afghanistan and the National Unity Government. In his opening speech President Ghani Ahmadzai stated,

> "We are gathered in this conference because the world community signed a promise that terrorism would not be tolerated, and today we are demanding that the world make good on this promise."

In that regard, I welcome the General Assembly's endorsement of the Secretary-General's proposal to create a new office on counter-terrorism headed by an Under-Secretary-General.

The Afghan vision for peace is premised on the fact that a stable Afghanistan would lead to a stable and more prosperous region. Achieving that vision will require the strong determination of all the States concerned, particularly of the region and the neighbourhood. The Afghan Government requested at the Kabul conference that the international community address this issue in all its facets. The nexus of crime, corruption and terrorism eventually undermines all States and the State system, which is why States must unite to combat it. The proof of our commitment will be a stable Afghanistan.

On the Afghan side, the recent series of security incidents has demonstrated the urgent need for reforms in the security sector. I welcome the Government's commitment to transparent, merit-based appointments and credible investigations into the events of 31 May, 2 and 3 June and 20 June, and other reforms in the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Defence.

Afghanistan faces numerous internal challenges in addition to fighting an insurgency that seems to be gaining ground. They include deep-rooted political tension, the difficulty of socially and economically reintegrating the thousands of Afghan refugees who return each day, an economy that is only very slowly recovering after the international drawdown in 2014, and pervasive corruption. The economy remains heavily dependent on development assistance. The private sector, as the biggest potential provider of employment, suffers from a lack of investor confidence and pervasive corruption. As a result, economic growth can neither match population growth nor generate enough employment for the many young Afghans entering the labour market every year. Corruption undermines the legitimacy of the State. It prevents a real economy from emerging. It contributes to insecurity. Corruption is at the heart of the problem of impunity, which itself is at the heart of the ongoing human rights challenges. Afghans alone are not to blame, but the consequences of corruption disproportionately affect Afghanistan.

In April, UNAMA issued its first comprehensive report on corruption in Afghanistan. I was gratified by the intensity of the public's response to the report. Afghans understand the effects of corruption and impunity because they face them every day. The National Unity Government has taken positive steps to tackle this problem by. Reforms that have begun to work in the Ministry of Defence are now being applied to the Ministry of Interior. The Anti-Corruption Justice Centre is proving to be an effective instrument.

With regard to human rights, UNAMA remains committed to provide credible data of the impact of the conflict of civilians, especially women and children. It continues to engage with all the main parties to the conflict to support them in taking measures to limit harm against civilians. UNAMA's report on the treatment of conflict detainees for the period 2015 and 2016 was published in April to coincide with the second

periodic review of Afghanistan by the United Nations Committee against Torture. UNAMA welcomes the Government's renewed commitment to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and to take further steps to eliminate the torture and ill-treatment of detainees. Those efforts must be accelerated to increase accountability and public trust in the Government.

The attack of 31 May and the events that followed should serve as a clarifying moment. We are at a point where we need to take conscious decisions to reverse negative trends and seek stability, or face far worse. The recent crisis has illustrated the dangers of pushing narrow interests, be they domestic or international, in Afghanistan's fragile context. There are two specific issues in particular that we must focus on.

First, in the domestic sphere, preparations must be accelerated for the next round of elections, both parliamentary and presidential. Decisions must be made regarding the use of technology and the role and modalities of international electoral assistance. Work must start on voter registration. The electoral calendar must be made clear. From my discussions with Afghan political actors, especially outside of Kabul, it is clear that the lack of clarity on those issues is a major component of the growing political mistrust. We understand that the Independent Election Commission will make an announcement as early as tomorrow regarding the date for parliamentary elections. I believe that announcement will contribute to allaying the political tensions I have referred to in this briefing.

Secondly, as I have repeatedly stated in this forum and elsewhere, a genuine peace process with the Taliban is essential and urgent. In the 6 June Kabul meeting, the need for a modus vivendi between Afghanistan and its neighbours was stressed. At the same time, I encourage the people of Afghanistan to begin an internal dialogue on the meaning of peace and reconciliation. The Government and the Taliban need to engage directly with each other to define a political solution. In that regard, the appointment of the new Chair of the High Peace Council is a welcome development, but it is only a first step towards the Council's revitalization and its new role in driving the peace process.

UNAMA is doing all it can to help contain political tensions, using its long-standing relationships and experience. I have been tremendously proud of the entire Mission and country team for those efforts. I was honoured to welcome the Secretary-General to Afghanistan last week, where his visit clearly demonstrated his and the Organization's commitment to Afghanistan, solidarity with its people and perseverance in the pursuit of peace.

We also look forward to the results of the strategic review that the Council has requested. We are hopeful and confident that it will ensure that we have the tools to continue to work for peace in Afghanistan. On the eve of the important Muslim holiday of Eid, I wish to reiterate my call for unity and to urge restraint, so that families and communities can enjoy a peaceful end of Ramadan.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Yamamoto for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

Mr. Saikal (Afghanistan): Let me begin by congratulating you, Mr. President on Bolivia's assumption of the Security Council's presidency in June. We thank you for convening today's open debate on the situation in Afghanistan to take stock of the overall situation in our country. I am pleased by the presence of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ambassador Yamamoto. We thank him for the comprehensive briefing.

We meet at a time when Afghanistan is undergoing another phase in its test to overcome adversity. Much has happened since the Council's deliberations on Afghanistan in March (see S/PV.7896). I will focus my remarks on some of the most pressing issues of my country's security and stability, as well as regional and international cooperation.

After almost four decades of imposed conflict, with hundreds of thousands of casualties and millions of displaced people — I emphasize millions of displaced people — our country remains under almost constant attack. Earlier this year, thanks to the effective measures taken by our security forces and their pre-emptive strikes, the so-called Taliban spring offensive came later than expected and was dealt heavy blows in different parts of the country. Unable to confront our forces directly, the orchestrators of our insecurity resorted to desperate urban terrorist attacks on soft targets and attempts to sow discord among our people.

In recent months, we have seen attacks of an unprecedented nature across Afghanistan — on the streets, in hospitals, cemeteries, mosques, diplomatic missions and political institutions. Since the start of 2017, major terrorist attacks in urban centres have caused significant losses of lives and property — more than 500 killed and more than 1,100 wounded in Kabul, Mazar-e Sharif, Kandahar, Lashkar Gah, Khost and Herat. The most recent barbarous attack took place last week when worshippers were offering evening prayers in a Kabul mosque.

While all attacks are equally condemnable, the sheer carnage of the 31 May attack was unprecedented in its kind in the history of Afghanistan. The truck-bombing in the heart of Kabul was by all accounts a crime against humanity and Islamic values, spreading horror instead of peace and piety during the holy month of Ramadan. More than 150 innocent souls were lost, including women, children and some of our young journalists. Several disappeared, without a trace, from the impact of the explosion. In fact, this morning, I was watching a television programme showing a young mother and her children walking around town on the streets of Kabul looking for her husband and their father — not knowing what happened him. The nation was plunged into deep mourning. The attack reaffirmed the obvious — that the enemies of Afghanistan know no limit in their brutality to break our pride and prevent peace and stability from taking root in our society. Beyond the human tragedy, the local economy lost millions of dollars and several diplomatic missions suffered damages.

The attack triggered the culmination of social frustration and a wave of angry protests seeking security reform, which unfortunately has been leaving more death and injury in its wake, including a triple terrorist attack at one of the slain protester's funeral. We firmly believe in the constitutional right of our people to protest and know that, if the door of dialogue is shut down between the Government and protestors, violence will increase. No element of the Afghan security forces, supported by national and international taxpayers, should ever inflict unnecessary harm upon civilians. Given recent events, the commander of the Kabul garrison and the police chief have been suspended and the incidents are being investigated. We remain committed to reassuring our people that our security forces are there to protect all Afghans and are at their disposal and service. In short, what transpired on that dreadful Wednesday morning was an attack on our people, our democracy, our economy and our partnership with the international community.

While Afghanistan continues to bleed, we have witnessed increased terrorist attacks in the United Kingdom, France, Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Mali, Russia, Sweden and Egypt — proving that terrorism has no boundaries and continues to threaten people everywhere. It is important that the civilized world, in its modern meaning, stand united in defiance of terror and secure peace and prosperity for current and future generations. We Afghans will do so in a spirit of national and global unity, which has enabled us to overcome difficult moments in our nation's life.

Reversing the tide against terror is contingent upon eliminating support centres beyond our frontiers that produce, nurture and empower terrorists operating in Afghanistan. The recently released outcome of a joint investigation by Afghanistan, the United Arab Emirates and the United States clearly establishes that the 10 January Kandahar attack was planned in Quetta, Pakistan. Similarly, early investigations verified the link between the Kabul truck bombing of 31 May and the Haqqani Network, based in Pakistan. A joint Afghan-German comprehensive investigation on the attack is currently under way. We shall release the outcome in due course.

The other external threat to Afghan sovereignty is the number of cross-frontier violations, which have increased dramatically — almost four-fold — since my presentation to the Council in March. Those violations, ranging from the firing of artillery shells, airspace violations and the construction of military posts and barriers to the digging of deep ditches — all of which exacerbate the current situation — if left unaddressed, will undoubtedly continue to undermine peace and security in our region.

In the Council, we have heard from a known neighbouring State that our Government "should not externalize its internal problems and blame others for its own failures." It is the same State that has been highly determined to do all it can to weaken and destabilize our country while accusing us of weakness. Let me remind everyone that those who would attribute Afghanistan's security and other challenges solely to internal issues are doing so to detract focus and attention from their long-standing policy of propagating violence and disorder in our country.

In dealing with the situation, we have been pursuing a three-pronged strategy: first, strengthening global counter-terrorism consensus with a focus on engaging Pakistan in genuine cooperation, ending cross-frontier violations and facilitating the peace process; secondly, strengthening our security and defensive capabilities; and, thirdly, improving national unity, governance and service-delivery to our people. Given the nature of the conflict, the success of our strategy depends upon collaborative and sustained work at national, regional and global levels.

Despite the enormous violence imposed on us over nearly four decades, especially this year, we remain firmly committed to the goal of sustaining peace. In that light, the 6 June Kabul process conference marked the resumption of an important initiative for stability in Afghanistan. The conference brought together regional countries, key international partners and relevant international institutions to focus on two imperatives: first, garnering a new level of commitment in support of our peace agenda and, secondly, identifying a common approach to end the cycle of terror and violence in the country.

We are pleased with the outcome of that conference, which reinstated cooperation mechanisms to promote peace and security. Naturally, Pakistan has an important role to play in ending violent extremism and promoting peace. We hope it will seize the opportunity for the benefit of its own citizens and stability in the region. Meeting on the margins of the recent Shanghai Cooperation Organization Summit in Astana, President Ghani Ahmadzai and Prime Minister Sharif agreed to hold a bilateral working group meeting in Kabul in the near future on confronting terrorism. Moreover, we also look forward to additional discussion within the framework of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group, with the participation of China and the United States.

Despite the difficult situation in the country, our security forces stand vigilant, protecting our people and infrastructure and preventing terrorists from capturing and establishing a presence in different provinces. They have responded robustly despite various logistical constraints in terms of resources, heavy weaponry and air capability. Let me pay tribute to the commitment and professionalism of those police officers who sacrificed their lives to prevent both the truck bomber of 31 May and last week's Kabul mosque attackers from reaching their intended targets and causing maximum casualties. The enemy is doing its best to stage so-called green-on-blue attacks in order to undermine international training programmes and support of our security forces. In addition, through selective targeting and the careful allocation of responsibility claims for terrorist attacks, the handlers of terrorism in the neighbourhood seek to create discord and distrust between our people and security forces. We will leave no room for any possible enemy infiltrators in our security forces.

The Government of National Unity is currently in the process of a national dialogue to strengthen consensus on relevant issues and address political grievances. We believe good governance can flourish only in an environment free of any particular ethnic or linguistic considerations. We will continue to focus on the greater task at hand — working towards economic self-sufficiency, tackling corruption and providing humanitarian relief for our people. Increasing economic development opportunities, with a focus on alleviating poverty and creating jobs, remains our key priority. Recent projects such as the Afghanistan-India air cargo corridor, the inauguration of public transport infrastructure in Kabul and the World Bank's $500 million financing for various development sector investments are few examples.

Today, the world faces an enemy united in its sole desire to bring death and destruction, dismantle State institutions and create chaos. Hence, it is imperative that the United Nations act decisively on its mandate, which is to maintain international peace and security. Last week, Secretary-General Guterres paid a visit to Kabul to express his solidarity with, and support for, the people and the Government of Afghanistan. That was a strong sign of his personal commitment to peace and security in our country, for which we are deeply grateful. In the broader context, his visit reaffirmed that the United Nations would remain beside us over the coming years as we continue our journey towards prosperity. We welcome the establishment of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism and hope that its activities and mandate will help bring real and tangible change to counter-terrorism efforts in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

In the past two years, we have reiterated time and again two key concerns for Afghanistan: first, concrete action against regional safe havens and logistical support to terrorists and ,secondly, cross-frontier violations, which I referred to before. On both issues, we have provided full briefings to the Secretary-General and the Security Council. The Council is yet

to take the necessary and appropriate action to address those two issues of concern. In our view, had it done so in the past, the situation would be different today. Another outstanding issue for the Council to act upon is the strict enforcement and strengthening of the sanctions regimes. Furthermore, the irreconcilable Taliban should be recognized as a terrorist group after its failure to engage meaningfully in the peace talks. The United Nations must also specify concrete criteria to clearly define State sponsorship of terrorism.

I take this opportunity to thank the Security Council for initiating a review of the structure, resources and activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. We consider it a necessary initiative for ensuring a more efficient and effective United Nations support role in the country. During the review process, we highlighted the imperative of the One United Nations initiative and an adjusted assistance role that would be in conformity with the principles of Afghan ownership and leadership, as well as the priority needs of Afghanistan. We wholeheartedly thank Under-Secretary-General Ján Kubiš for leading the review process in the most able manner, and the United Nations team on the ground for their contributions to the process.

In conclusion, despite all the challenges, our people are looking to the future with confidence. They have made enormous sacrifices thus far. As such, failure is not an option. That said, the support of the international community, including the Council, will be critically important for our success.

I would like to reiterate our gratitude for the Council's expression of firm support for the stability and prosperity of Afghanistan. Today, as we stand at a crossroads in our stabilization efforts, we look to the Security Council to help us overcome our security challenges by confronting the source of the ongoing conflict, and not by dealing with the consequences. In that connection, the need for an appropriate response by the Council to the task at hand cannot be overstated. We hope that that is realized so that our people are able to meet their basic aspirations of living in peace and security — free of terror, violence and destruction.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I thank Special Representative Tadamichi Yamamoto for his informative and clear briefing.

I listened very carefully to our colleague Ambassador Mahmoud Saikal as he explained his views on the situation in his country.

I would like to begin by expressing Japan's deep condolences to the families of the victims of the terrorist attack that occurred on 31 May in Kabul, and deep regret for all acts of violence committed in the country since our last debate in March (see S/PV.7896). Such brutal attacks have deprived countless Afghans of their futures. They also crystallize our concerns about the deteriorating security situation noted in the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/508). We are alarmed by the fact that it was not possible to prevent these appalling crimes from being conducted in the heart of the capital city.

In order to improve the security situation, the international community has continued to provide political support to the Government of Afghanistan, and financial support and training to the Afghan security sector. Unfortunately, we see little fundamental change in the security situation in Afghanistan.

More fundamentally, the seeming erosion of unity in the National Unity Government is profoundly concerning. The flare-up of political and ethnic tensions within the Government must be absolutely avoided given the enormity of the challenges Afghanistan faces. There need to be more effective measures for engaging with ethnic communities, which are underrepresented in the Government. The Government must return to its 2014 commitments, which underscored the necessity of equitable representation, with attention to inclusiveness and the unique political and societal composition of Afghanistan.

Also among the unmet commitments are the long-overdue parliamentary elections, which should have been held in 2015. We are aware that elections have the potential to worsen existing tensions and create new ones, leading to further fragmentation, as noted in the Secretary-General's report. However, continued delays are also problematic, and we urge the Afghan Government to demonstrate its commitment by announcing the timeline for parliamentary and district council elections. I was pleased to hear today from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in this Chamber that there may be an announcement

soon from the Afghan Government. The Government can make good use of the extensive United Nations experience in electoral support to ensure that the voices of Afghan voters are heard through the parliamentary and district council elections, as well as the 2019 presidential election.

The devastating terrorist attack on 31 May was a tragic wake-up call for Afghanistan and the international community to recognize the urgency of revitalizing the peace process. The Kabul process meeting on 6 June was a good opportunity for Afghanistan to show its strong commitment to making progress in the peace process with the support of international and regional partners. Japan emphasizes that the Government must not only express willingness, it must also deliver concrete results to the Afghan people. Support from regional and international stakeholders is also crucial. We therefore welcome the 10 June talks in Astana between Afghanistan and Pakistan, where they agreed to reinvigorate the Quadrilateral Coordination Group.

Japan is pleased to note positive efforts in the area of displacement. We have seen improved protection of civilians as well as coordination among Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. In a recent informal meeting with Council members, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees noted improved Afghan Government efforts to absorb and integrate the dramatically increased number of returning refugees from neighbouring countries. We welcome the Secretary-General's visit to the internally displaced persons camp in Kabul on 14 June, which sent a very encouraging signal to some of the country's most desperate people. This visit underlines the necessity of international and United Nations support for the Afghan people's aspirations for peace and stability.

In these challenging circumstances, the implementation of resolution 2344 (2017), which mandated the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to support the people and the Government of Afghanistan in achieving peace and stability, is essential. We also await the results next month of the strategic review authorized by the resolution. We look forward to the Secretary-General's fresh inputs into the review following his visit to Kabul. Japan believes that the review must be an objective and impartial guideline for Council members in considering next steps. Once we have received the review, Japan, as the lead country on this file, will work with other Council members and stakeholders participating in today's debate to determine UNAMA's role in overcoming the difficult realities we currently face.

Mr. Bitimov (Kazakhstan) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamato, for his substantive briefing and for his commitment to the personnel of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), which seeks to restore peace and security in Afghanistan, and for UNAMA's contribution to achieving that goal. We are also grateful to the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan for his statement. I know Mr. Saikal very well: he is an excellent political statesman in Kabul.

My delegation would like to share the following substantive considerations on the issue of the agenda before us. Since the previous report (S/2017/189), a number of major changes have taken place in the country at the political level. Kazakhstan welcomes intensification in the reporting period of the efforts of the Afghanistan Government to settle the internal political crisis and establish peace in the country. Proof of this, inter alia, is the return to Kabul of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the release of detainees of the Hizb-i Islami party, the holding, in complex conditions, of the international conference of the Kabul process on peace and security cooperation, on 6 June, and the recent meeting between Afghan President Ghani Ahmadzai and Pakistani Prime Minister Sharif in Astana as part of the Summit meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which gives hope for improved bilateral relations and new joint measures to combat terrorism.

We believe that the consultations on Afghanistan in various formats are important and necessary if the political differences are to be overcome and if joint efforts are to be made to facilitate the peace talks. Despite the open refusal of the Taliban to sit at the negotiating table with the Afghan Government, we need to continue to make efforts to find a peaceful solution, as no other alternative exists.

The situation in Afghanistan was the focus of the historic Shanghai Cooperation Organization Summit in Astana on 8 and 9 June, where India and Pakistan became full-fledged members. We believe that, thanks to the accession of these two States to the SCO, the issue of tackling regional problems, including with regard to Afghanistan, will take place more dynamically. At the

same time, we note the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan. The latest series of major terrorist acts in the country means that whole international community must take more decisive steps to eradicate this scourge.

At the counter-terrorist level, Kazakhstan is troubled by the appearance of certain radical terror groups in the north of Afghanistan and notes, in that respect, the growing threat to the security of the Central Asian States. The situation of Afghanistan plays a special role in providing long-term stability and security for the whole region. In that regard, Kazakhstan comprehensively shares and supports the vision of Secretary General Guterres on bolstering preventive diplomacy. Just a few days ago, on 13 June, this issue was raised at the ministerial conference in Ashgabat. It was also raised during the Secretary-General's visit to Kabul on 15 June.

On the anti-narcotics front, we are concerned about the spread of opium poppy cultivation and the increase in drug production in Afghanistan. By some estimates, in 2016 drug dealers' total income in Afghanistan amounted to approximately $400 million. In our view, only joint efforts at the international and regional levels can achieve positive results in the fight against drug trafficking, which is a source of financing for terrorism.

One of the legacies of the ongoing armed conflict in Afghanistan is the deterioration of the humanitarian situation, in which the civilian population, especially its more vulnerable sectors, such as women, children and the elderly, is suffering and dying, while their homes and agricultural infrastructure are being ruined. We call for comprehensive steps to be taken to assist Afghanistan on the humanitarian front.

On the economic front, the continued critical condition of Afghanistan's socioeconomic sector is very worrying. Unfortunately, the measures that have been taken by the Government of Afghanistan and the international community are not enough. According to the experts, the main reason for the economic recession is the continuing lack of security, which is closely tied to development issues. In that regard, Kazakhstan has always believed that security and development are intertwined and should be promoted in parallel. With that in mind, we will continue to assist Afghanistan with development. Since 2008, Kazakhstan has donated approximately $100 million worth of aid, including free education for 1,000 Afghan students. At the Kazakhstan Government's expense, the road between Kunduz and Takhar has been repaved and a school in Dara Suf, in Samangan province, built, and a hospital in the Waras district of Bamyan province is being completed. In Samangan province, a number of bridges are being built over the Aybak River and its banks are being fortified.

In the light of all the issues I have mentioned, we would like to make the following recommendations. On the political front, the current international approaches to Afghanistan, including the position of the Security Council, should be reviewed with the aim of strengthening regional relationships with Afghanistan's neighbours, particularly in Central Asia. We should define a limited number of vital, high-priority tasks and put all the focus on solving them, without wasting energy and resources on lower-priority issues. As the principal United Nations body responsible for international peace and security, the Council should take regional interests into account while developing and adopting a clear, step-by-step plan for stabilizing Afghanistan, with the participation of the National Unity Government, that will outline the highest-priority tasks and the sequence and timing for dealing with them. Without this, and with a focus only on peacekeeping rhetoric, humanitarian assistance and donor infusions for the conflict-resolution process, it will be exceedingly difficult to achieve the goals of peace and stability for Afghanistan.

As a body specifically empowered by the Security Council and as an unbiased player, UNAMA's role in the intra-Afghan political settlement process should be enhanced. It should collaborate more actively with the National Unity Government in the interests of the Afghan people and all members of civil society working to help Afghanistan achieve national reconciliation and advance the peace process.

On the economic front, we must change perceptions of Afghanistan so that it is seen not as a threat, but as an important partner. In that regard, it is essential to help the Afghan economy integrate with those of the countries of Central Asia by implementing infrastructure, trade, investment and transit-transportation projects. In Almaty, which already hosts 18 regional and subregional United Nations offices, we should establish a regional centre for coordinating and directing the implementation of all activity aimed at promoting sustainable development, building economic capacity for countering terrorism and channelling cost-

effective humanitarian assistance from the Organization to Afghanistan.

On the anti-drug front, we should support the coordinated measures that are being undertaken by the Government of Afghanistan, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), INTERPOL and the Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre for Combating the Illicit Trafficking of Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and Their Precursors, as recommended at the sixth Steering Committee Meeting of the UNODC Regional Programme for Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries, organized in Astana in April by the Government of Kazakhstan.

Ms. Sison (United States of America): I would like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his briefing and the courageous dedication of the entire United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) team to supporting governance, development and reconciliation in Afghanistan.

I would like to begin by offering our deepest condolences to the victims of the recent violence in Kabul and their families. Such events are a sad reminder of the unacceptable toll that the conflict in Afghanistan continues to take on its people. The 31 May bombing sought to divide the Afghan Government and people, as well as Afghanistan's international partners. As armed groups inflict suffering on innocent civilians, our resolve to stand with the people and the Government of Afghanistan in pursuing a peaceful resolution of the conflict and stability in the country will not waver.

The United States is reviewing its engagement and security posture in Afghanistan. It is appropriate to take the time to make sure that we are carrying forward our commitment to Afghanistan in the most effective way possible. While the review continues, there can be no question that the United States remains wholly engaged in supporting the Afghan Government, diplomatically and militarily; supporting the development of the Afghan security forces, including through the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission; continuing its generous provision of civilian assistance; doing its part diplomatically to strengthen the international and regional consensus; and working to advance an Afghan peace process.

That leads me to a point I want to make about the political process in Afghanistan. The first meeting of the Kabul process for peace and security cooperation, convened by the Afghan Government on 6 June, reaffirmed the commitment of Afghanistan, its neighbours in the region and the international community to supporting an Afghan-led and -owned political process for achieving peace in Afghanistan. The United States joined the 27 countries and organizations represented at the meeting to call on armed and extremist groups to announce an immediate end to their attacks and their entry into peace talks with the Afghan Government. In that context, we commend the Government for its continued commitment to an inclusive, Afghan-led peace process, despite the ongoing attacks.

Progress in implementing the peace agreement with Hizb-i Islami gives us hope for similar progress towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict with the Taliban. Such talks are essential. There is no military solution that will bring a durable peace. The path to a negotiated settlement is available, and the Taliban must choose to take it. In fact, a durable peace and genuine stability in Afghanistan can come only with the commitment of Afghanistan's neighbours and near-neighbours to those goals. We welcome the commitments made during the Kabul process meetings and call on Afghanistan's neighbours to unconditionally cease their support for armed and violent-extremist groups. Those commitments are important right now. The Taliban, along with the Haqqani Network and affiliates of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham and other armed groups, is increasing its attacks, killing and injuring thousands of Afghans and delaying the progress that Afghanistan so desperately needs. And while development assistance remains robust, a precipitous drop in domestic and foreign direct investment has stalled the private-sector-led growth that Afghanistan needs in order to employ its youth, reduce poverty and give communities hope.

In the context of those and other challenges Afghanistan continues to face, we strongly support the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan as an essential partner of Afghanistan and the international community. UNAMA plays a critical role in supporting peace and reconciliation, empowering women, defending the human rights of all Afghans and coordinating humanitarian assistance. We look forward to the completion next month of the Secretary-General's strategic review and to discussing ways to strengthen the Mission's efficiency, cost-effectiveness and core competencies.

Mr. Skau (Sweden): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr. Yamamoto, for his candid briefing, and we welcome the Secretary-General's comprehensive report (S/2017/508). We also welcome the Secretary-General's visit to Afghanistan, which demonstrated his solidarity with the Afghan people.

Despite decades of effort by national and international actors to stabilize the security situation in Afghanistan, the situation today remains volatile and has deteriorated further since we last met (see S/PV.7896). The ongoing violence takes a heavy toll on the civilian population. Each attack on a mosque, each bazaar, home, hospital or school targeted, each life lost, undermines the ability of the Afghan people to plan their lives and futures with hope or certainty.

Let me reiterate Sweden's condemnation of the recent terrorist attacks in Kabul and extend our heartfelt condolences to the families of those affected. We call for an end to this senseless violence and for those responsible to be held to account.

We encourage the Afghan Government to take the necessary steps to defuse the tensions following the attacks. As we heard today from the Special Representative, unity is of the utmost importance if the people of Afghanistan are to tackle the many challenges ahead. Internal differences must be put aside in order to make progress with the reform agenda and to bring an end to the conflict.

As the Secretary-General says in his report, "[p]eace must be attained through negotiations and not on the battlefield" (*S/2017/508, para. 58*). With that in mind, we commend the Afghan Government on the first meeting of the Kabul process for peace and security cooperation. We look forward to the next meeting under the process and to cooperating closely with the Afghan authorities to ensure women's participation. A peace process without women is not a peace process. Sweden remains fully committed to supporting an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process. We also echo the calls of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the need to restart the dialogue with the Taliban towards a lasting political settlement.

All of us, but particularly the countries of the region, have an interest in a peaceful and stable Afghanistan. In turn, sustained and constructive engagement by the region will be essential to make that a reality. Regional tensions continue to undermine Afghanistan's long-term stability and economic growth. We call on all parties to act constructively and responsibly and work together towards sustainable peace. Enhanced dialogue between Afghanistan and Pakistan is an important part of this complex puzzle.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) continues to play a critical role in supporting the Government and the people of Afghanistan as they work towards building a democratic, prosperous and peaceful society. However, significant challenges to that goal remain. Against that background, an efficient, effective and appropriately configured United Nations presence in Afghanistan — in Kabul, as well as in the provinces — continues to be vital to support efforts to achieve lasting peace. We welcome the ongoing strategic review and await the final report. Looking forward, Sweden sees the following priorities for United Nations support to Afghanistan.

First, there is a need for a comprehensive approach that includes development, human rights, the rule of law and humanitarian assistance. Providing appropriate support will require a coherent and well-coordinated United Nations.

Secondly, it is important to continue UNAMA's field presence at current levels, so as to safeguard crucial contacts between international and local actors, build local capacities, as well as facilitate humanitarian access.

Thirdly, there is a need for a stronger political mandate for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, including on regional issues related to peace efforts, and with sufficient resources to implement this political mandate.

Fourthly, we see the need for improved donor coordination, with a continued sharp focus on development, humanitarian and human rights issues.

Fifthly, women's participation and integration into the political, economic and social life of Afghanistan must be at the core of UNAMA's activities.

Finally, children continue to suffer disproportionately from the violence in Afghanistan. We welcome an enhanced focus on children and armed conflict. Words must now be translated into action with respect to this agenda. In addition, ensuring respect for humanitarian principles, human rights and international humanitarian law should always be an integral part of United Nations missions.

Building peaceful and inclusive societies is not easy. It takes patience, courage and determination from all the parties involved. We must now ensure that the gains made in Afghanistan are not lost. Renewed efforts from Afghan leaders and the international community are needed to move the country down the path to peace. Sweden has provided assistance to Afghanistan for more than three decades, and we are committed to stand with the Afghans for the long term.

Mr. Ciss (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): I would also like to thank Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and the Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), and the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations, Mr. Mahmoud Saikal, for their important briefings.

Unfortunately, during the first half of 2017, the security situation in Afghanistan deteriorated, with an increase in deadly terrorist attacks. The attacks, including the 31 May suicide bombing in Kabul, which caused at least 90 dead and more than 500 wounded have once again covered Afghanistan with blood. My delegation reiterates its firm condemnation of those attacks, which have once again cost the lives of hundreds of innocent people. My delegation also wish to express its condolences to the victims and to their families.

The demonstrations that took place in the wake of those attacks, far from calming the political situation, have only served to exacerbate both political and ethnic tensions. Nevertheless, we are pleased that the two highest authorities of the country, the President, Mr. Ashraf Ghani, and the Chief Executive, Mr. Abdullah Abdullah, undertook a constructive dialogue aimed at improving their relations.

Another positive event that my delegation wishes to welcome is the continued implementation of the peace agreement between the Government and the Hizb-i Islami organization of Mr. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, as attested to by the return to Kabul of Mr. Hekmatyar on 4 May. However, we regret the lack of meaningful progress in the peace talks between the Government and the Taliban, a situation that contributes to the high level of violence, which we deplore, throughout the country.

Nevertheless, despite this environment, we are pleased to note that the Afghan Government, as well as its partners, remain determined to make efforts for peace and stability to return to Afghanistan. As such, we believe that the vision for peace expressed by the Afghan Government in a document that stresses the need for an inclusive peace process to put an end to the conflict, as well as the appointment of the Chair of the High Peace Council, are steps in the right direction.

The efforts of international forces to support their Afghan counterparts has continued to be a determining factor in combating terrorist groups, in particular the Taliban and Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. With regard to regional cooperation, besides the efforts of the Afghan and Pakistan Governments to improve relations, we can also highlight the fact that the countries of the region have spared no effort to restore peace in Afghanistan. Accordingly, the situation in that country fortunately remained the primary focus of concern during substantive meetings held in Astana, as well as during the recent Kabul process for peace and security cooperation conference on 6 June.

For its part, UNAMA, whose outstanding work I would like to take the opportunity to commend, has continued to actively support local peace initiatives in a number of provinces and, moreover, worked in multiple ways to support the Government and the people of Afghanistan.

I am pleased to note that, on 6 June, UNAMA supported a conference on women's role in the peace process — something that we deem to be important — in Herat province at which participants vigorously called for concrete action to implement Afghanistan's national action plan on resolution 1325 (2000).

The human rights and humanitarian situation remains concerning because of persistent insecurity, which, as we know, has entailed an increase in the number of civilian casualties, including, unfortunately, many women and children.

My delegation would like to take this opportunity to commend the commitment of not only the relevant United Nations agencies but also that of the relevant non-governmental organizations as well as their crucial contribution to meeting the needs of the population — a push spurred by solidarity that Afghanistan still urgently requires in a difficult economic situation characterized by weak growth and a regrettable level of productivity.

On behalf of the Senegalese delegation, I would like to conclude by reiterating its encouragement to the Afghan Government as well as its full support for the Special Representative and the UNAMA team.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, for his comprehensive analysis of the situation in Afghanistan. We listened with interest to the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, Mr. Mahmoud Saikal. We agree with the assessments made in the report (S/2017/508) of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan. We support the personal efforts of Secretary-General Guterres with regard to ensuring a sustainable Afghan settlement. In that regard, we echo the profound and far-reaching statement by the representative of Kazakhstan.

Afghanistan needs to become an active participant in future regional and integrational processes. Afghanistan has always been and will remain a friend of Russia. In that regard, the recent series of terrorist attacks that recently swept the country have weighed heavily on us. We extend our sincere condolences to the Government and the people of Afghanistan for the victims of those appalling crimes. We express our solidarity with those from the diplomatic corps who suffered from those attacks. We are seriously concerned about the growing internal political and military tension within the country. Afghanistan is seemingly unable to break the vicious cycle of violence, and the situation continues to grow worse, with low levels of economic growth and the increasing terrorist threat. This string of problems is a major burden for the people of Afghanistan, including its selfless armed forces.

In that vein, what is increasingly important with regard to stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan is the task of achieving national reconciliation. We support the corresponding efforts undertaken by Kabul in that respect. We proceed from the premise that the process must be guided and implemented by the Afghans themselves. We are ready to provide assistance in promoting that, including through flexibly approaching issues that concern potentially loosening the sanctions regime of the relevant Security Council committees. At the same time, we note the decreasing effectiveness of many of the international mechanisms for supporting national reconciliation in Afghanistan, which seem to involve too many actors. On the other hand, narrow formats clearly do not take into account the interests of many of the countries of the region, which also negatively affects the results of their work.

In that regard, we are convinced that the launch of the Moscow talks on Afghanistan at the beginning of the year is an inclusive and the most promising method for establishing direct and constructive dialogue on issues concerning national reconciliation. The refusal of certain States to participate in those talks for no specific reason has left us perplexed. Given that India and Pakistan have become full members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and that Afghanistan and Iran have applied, the prospects for national reconciliation can only grow.

We must acknowledge that the main tasks facing the international military presence in the country over the past 15 years remain unrealized. In many cases, the situation has actually gotten worse. We are not looking to accuse anyone, as that is not our political practice. Let me make it clear to everyone that that is not our goal. The task of reaching a settlement in Afghanistan requires a consolidation of international and regional efforts. Only our collective joint efforts will allow us to unravel the complex tangle of problems and move the country towards stable development in an atmosphere of cooperation and good neighbourliness. That is the only way in which counter-terrorism efforts will yield the necessary benefits. In that regard, we support the arrangements reached between President Ahmadzai of Afghanistan and Prime Minister Sharif of Pakistan at the Astana meeting.

However, instead of making progress on a unification agenda, some of our partners would appear to resort to baseless allegations and rhetoric, including against Russia. I would like to point out that many years ago Russia was one of the first countries to draw the attention of the international community and the Afghans to the spike in terror activity in the northern part of the country. Our country made a significant contribution to counter-terrorism efforts in Afghanistan, including in cooperation with the United States and NATO. We are referring to the transit of military cargo, supplying helicopters and the training of Afghan troops. We are very troubled by the intensification of the capabilities of Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham in Afghanistan. The ranks of that group are being filled. Its devastating potential is growing. The problem is dangerous and must not be ignored or glossed over.

We have received reports of flights of unidentified aircraft that have been observed providing assistance to Afghan militants. The scale and scope of those flights are expanding. They are already reaching the provinces

of Sari Pul, Farah Kandahar, Herat and Nangarhar. The flights often end as soon as the Afghan authorities publish the relevant information. We need to keep the situation under close review and we need to clamp down on that type of cove activities. We deem the demand by Afghan members of Parliament to clarify the situation well grounded, and we expect the United Nations Mission to provide a comprehensive report on those events.

Narcotics pose a serious threat to stability in Afghanistan and its neighbours, and to our friends and allies in Central Asia. We are troubled by data showing that drug production and poppy crops are once again expanding. The rise in income from drug trafficking is inevitably spurring terrorist activity. In that regard, we call for international efforts to be stepped up in combating Afghan drug trafficking. We see good potential for bolstering counter-narcotics cooperation between Afghanistan and the Collective Security Treaty Organization.

Once again we repeat that the complex problems in Afghanistan can be solved only on the basis of broad, sincere cooperation at international and regional levels. The task of harmonizing the approaches of external players is becoming more urgent. Addressing that task with a view to achieving sustainable national reconciliation in Afghanistan is the very purpose of the Moscow negotiations.

Mr. Hickey (United Kingdom): Let me join others in welcoming Special Representative Yamamoto back to the Security Council. At the outset, I would like to reiterate the full support of the United Kingdom for him and for the vital work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

Sadly, as he and the Afghan Ambassador have made clear, these are trying times for Afghanistan. The horrific truck-bomb three weeks ago in Kabul was a stark reminder of the threat that ordinary Afghans face as they go about their daily peaceful lives. It is a threat that we read about, that we watch on the news or hear about in the Chamber, and yet the proximity of the attack to the British Embassy and other diplomatic missions in Kabul really brought home to us the barbarity of those who seek to terrorize Afghanistan. Sadly, it was once again innocent Afghan men, women and children who bore the terrible toll of that attack.

In response to this horrific tide of violence, the United Kingdom stands in solidarity with the people, the Government and the armed forces of Afghanistan. We stand in solidarity, knowing what it means to endure terror in our streets, knowing what it means to stand up to those who seek to divide us. Whether in the streets of Kabul, Manchester or London, our message must be clear and unwavering: enough is enough.

Those attacks must come to an end. All support to those who commit such terrible acts must come to an end. For Afghanistan, that means the region working together to create the conditions for a more stable future for Afghanistan. It means continuing to prioritize an Afghan-led and -owned peace process — one that leads to a political settlement that ends the violence. It means acknowledging the successes the Afghan Government has achieved in such challenging circumstances. It means Afghans coming together to protect those gains in the face of such huge challenges.

Afghanistan needs to be united now more than ever. It needs to be looking to the future in hope, not in fear. The people of Afghanistan need to feel that they have a stake in that future. We believe that holding parliamentary elections based on a credible and realistic timeline would be an important step towards creating that stake, towards creating broader political inclusion. The setting of a date would be good news and should serve as a catalyst for the necessary reforms to be undertaken and processes to be put in place with due speed to ensure that elections are free, fair and transparent.

We welcome President Ghani's work to reshape and re-energize his Government's efforts in pursuit of peace. As the tragic events in Kabul remind us, now is the time for action and for the implementation of the structures and the processes that will bring about progress on this daunting but essential issue. Afghans from across the country, its ethnic groups and its socioeconomic divides have a stake in this process and need to be embraced and included in pursuit of a national consensus on peace. We encourage meaningful dialogue with all sectors of society, including women and girls.

In all of this, the United Kingdom believes that the United Nations has a crucial role to play — whether by helping to ensure that the rights of Afghan people are protected and upheld or by supporting the Kabul process and its vital work, on building a regional consensus on peace.

I want to thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his role in facilitating the launch of the Kabul process earlier this month. That was the first step in a long journey that will need to emphasize both the security and the political tracks, and which will require energy and commitment from all of us to sustain, including from the United Nations. As such, we look forward to the outcome of the strategic review of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. UNAMA is at the heart of the international community's work on Afghanistan. It is more important now than ever that the Mission be properly configured and empowered to deliver the maximum effect on the issues that are so crucial for Afghanistan's future — whether it is efforts to support the Government's pursuit of peace or its work to uphold the human rights of the Afghan people.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China welcomes the convening of this open debate on Afghanistan. I wish to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Tadamichi Yamamoto for his briefing.

Peace and stability in Afghanistan has a bearing on the fundamental interests of the Afghan people, as well as regional security, stability, development and prosperity. China commends the efforts of the Afghan Government in promoting national stability, reconciliation and economic development, and appreciates the constructive help of the neighbours of Afghanistan and the relevant countries in the region.

Afghanistan faces daunting challenges in the political, economic and security sectors. Recently, the security situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated, with frequent armed conflicts and terrorist incidents leading to massive civilian casualties, which has captured the attention of all parties. It is imperative for the international community to step up efforts in taking comprehensive measures to promote the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan so as to help the country overcome difficulties and get through this challenging period.

First of all, priority should be given to the prompt restoration of security and stability in the country. The international community should vigorously support the capacity-building efforts of the Afghan national security forces to improve its self-defence capabilities in order to effectively cope with the threats posed by terrorism, cross-border crime and drug trafficking. The international community should stick to a unified standard in enhancing coordination and cooperation to fight against terrorist forces in Afghanistan, cut off the supply of funds and weapons to terrorist organizations, prevent the inflow and return of terrorist combatants, curb the spread of terrorist ideology and eliminate the root causes of terrorism.

Secondly, promoting the national reconciliation process is an important foundation for the long-term peace and stability of the country. Parties in Afghanistan should bear in mind the future of the country and the interests of its people by actively participating in the reconciliation process, resolve differences and conflicts and restore trust through dialogue with a view to finding a solution that is acceptable to all.

The peace agreement between the Afghan Government and the Hezb-i Islami (Gulbuddin) should be implemented, which will serve as a model for further promoting national reconcil the country. The international community should continue its full support for an inclusive reconciliation process that is led and owned by the Afghan people and encourage the parties concerned in Afghanistan to launch peace talks as soon as possible.

Thirdly, strengthening governance capabilities is an important guarantee for peace and reconstruction in the country. Afghan issues should ultimately be managed by the Afghan people. All political factions in Afghanistan should strengthen unity, resolve differences through dialogue and consultations and reach consensus in order to build strong and effective governance capabilities. The international community should respect the right of the Afghan people to independently choose their political system and path to development. Meanwhile, in the light of the national development strategy and Afghanistan's special needs, targeted assistance should be provided to help the Afghan Government improve its governance capabilities.

Fourthly, integration in regional development is a viable solution for peace and reconstruction in Afghanistan. The international community should actively honour its commitments to provide assistance and support the economic and social development of the country. Afghanistan enjoys advantages in resources and geographic location, which brings about great prospects for regional cooperation. As resolution 2344 (2017) and the relevant General Assembly resolutions stipulate, parties should be committed to creating a community with a shared destiny in a

spirit of cooperation in which everyone wins, and to promoting the economic and social development of Afghanistan and regional cooperation through the Belt and Road Initiative. We hope that parties will actively encourage the alignment of the Afghanistan national development strategy with the Belt and Road Initiative, improve links between Afghanistan and Central Asia and other neighbouring countries and provide security guarantees for the implementation of relevant projects so as to help Afghanistan achieve regional development and capitalize on shared development opportunities.

China commends the efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and hopes UNAMA will play an active role in helping Afghanistan restore stability, advance national reconciliation, improve its governance capabilities and promote economic and social development. China will continue to support UNAMA's work. China hopes that the ongoing strategic review will help UNAMA focus more on peace, reconciliation and development, strengthen its capabilities in coordinating international support, further optimize resource allocation, improve the management process and enhance its ability to cope with complicated situations.

China has always been a friendly neighbour to Afghanistan and respects the country's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. We have been promoting the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan through the Quadrilateral Coordination Group — made up of Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the United States. We support Afghanistan's efforts to eliminate the threats of terrorism, extremism and drug-related crime, in order to achieve peace, stability and prosperity as soon as possible. China will continue to support Afghanistan in stepping up capacity-building in the security sector and we support an active role by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in helping Afghanistan combat terrorism. China supports Afghanistan's integration in regional cooperation and actively promotes the alignment of the Belt and Road Initiative with the Afghanistan national development strategy. We stand ready to work with the international community to make unremitting efforts in promoting peace, stability and development in Afghanistan as soon as possible.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): We express our appreciation to Special Representative Mr. Yamamoto for his comprehensive briefing on the most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/508) on the overall situation in Afghanistan and the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report, which highlights the key political and security challenges facing Afghanistan. The briefing by Special Representative Yamamoto was not only comprehensive, it was also very frank and insightful.

Let me also take this opportunity to thank our colleague the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan for his briefing. It was a very useful briefing.

We also welcome the recent visit by the Secretary-General to the country to express solidarity with the people and the Government of Afghanistan following the recent terrorist attacks. We condemn those senseless attacks in the strongest possible terms and express our sympathy and solidarity with the people and the Government of Afghanistan. The threats posed by terrorist groups of all kinds are indeed a matter of serious security concern, not only for the country but also for the wider region. We cannot agree more with the Secretary-General's comments in his report in favour of concerted international efforts in countering terrorism.

The long-term security and stability of Afghanistan can be assured only through a comprehensive and inclusive Afghan-led and owned political process. In that connection, we note that some progress has been made. However, we understand that peace talks between the Government and the Taliban have shown no progress and the trajectory does not appear promising on that front. We agree with the Secretary-General that a regional environment conducive to an Afghan-led peace process is indeed essential. It is that context that we welcome the Afghan Government's initiative to convene the Kabul process conference on peace and security cooperation, which was held this month in spite of a difficult security situation. The efforts of UNAMA and the promotion of peace, reconciliation and dialogue in support for development in Afghanistan, with full respect for the country's sovereignty and leadership and ownership of the Afghan Government, remains very important. The role of countries of the region is also very critical in creating the necessary conditions for the fight against terrorism and the advancement of peace efforts. In that regard, the recent meeting between the President of Afghanistan and the Prime Minister of Pakistan to improve bilateral relations between their countries is noteworthy but needs to be pursued with greater vigour, all the more so in the light

of the fact that mutual trust is always critical and its absence detrimental.

We welcome the efforts made by the National Unity Government in pushing its reform agenda, fighting corruption and enhancing accountability. We also understand from the report of the Secretary-General that progress has been made towards the holding of credible and transparent elections. We nonetheless stress how critical it is to ensure that there is some level of coherence and unity of purpose in the country's top leadership — and that is true with any Government.

Afghanistan faces enormous security, social and economic challenges. Without continued inclusive economic growth and development, sustained peace and security cannot be achieved. That is why there is a need to support the Government's continued efforts to detail its development priorities in 10 national priority programmes for 10 sectors, as envisioned in the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework. We hope that the commitments made at the Brussels Conference last October will be honoured. But, once again, for that all to succeed, peace and security in the country will need to be secured and confidence generated.

Let me conclude by expressing support and solidarity with the Afghan Government in its difficult task of addressing the country's multiple challenges with a view to promoting peace, reconciliation and development. I also wish to express appreciation to UNAMA for its continued role in support of those endeavours and for its efforts in carrying out its mandate under very difficult circumstances.

Mr. Lambertini (Italy): Italy aligns itself with the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union. I wish to make some remarks in my national capacity.

At the outset, I would like first of all to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Yamamoto, for his presence here today, for his briefing and for his commitment to the work.

My country joins other Security Council members in strongly condemning the recent terrorist attacks in Kabul and other parts of the country. We extend our condolences to the victims and their families and express our full solidarity with the people and the Government of Afghanistan. Those despicable acts strengthens our determination to support Afghanistan's institutions in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism, which continue to pose a grave threat to peace and stability. That is why we welcome, like others, the Secretary-General's visit to Kabul last week, as it sent an important signal to the international community as a whole.

We welcome the successful outcome of the first meeting of the Kabul process for peace and security cooperation. By taking this initiative, our Afghan partners have signalled their willingness to pursue the peace and reconciliation process with renewed vigour. We commend the Afghan leadership on these issues, which further reinforces the principle that the process should be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned. Through its participation in the Kabul process, Italy seeks to express its full support for this initiative. We believe that it is a starting point, and not an end point, and we also hope that broad international backing can provide a solid foundation for positive outcomes in this area.

The Kabul process also confirms the crucial importance of cooperation among regional stakeholders. Afghanistan's terrorist and violent extremist phenomenon, both in its national dimension and beyond, cannot be tackled effectively without close cooperation and unity of purpose among neighbouring countries of the region. Terrorism and violence extremism are a concrete threat to those countries' stability as well. There is a clear convergence of interests. However, tangible measures to extend cooperation, especially at the regional level, must be adopted. Italy supports all initiatives geared towards that goal.

The need for a credible and broad-based reconciliation process underscores the fact that peace in Afghanistan can be achieved only through political means. There is no military solution to this conflict, as we are all reminded by the latest report of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) on the protection of civilians, which demonstrates how the most vulnerable categories, especially women and children, are increasingly at risk. The focus on a broad-based and inclusive consensus as the foundation for a successful reconciliation process is key, and we welcome the decision by the Afghan Government to make it the centrepiece of its strategy.

In that context, it will be essential to ensure women's active inclusion and participation, and we renew our hope that the commitment of the Afghan Government and the High Peace Council in this area may find

further tangible application, for instance, through the full implementation of the Afghanistan national action plan on resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security. That goal is all the more important in the framework of safeguarding and further building upon the progress made in women's rights in Afghanistan over the course of the past 16 years.

The continued violent acts by hostile insurgent groups remind us of the fundamental importance of strengthening Afghanistan's institutions, specifically those with the task of ensuring the security and defence of the country and its people. My country supports and encourages the Afghan Government to continue to enhance its efforts to improve the capability of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. To be successful, those efforts will also require a determined fight against all forms of corruption, which Italy will continue to support through its training and advisory activities in the framework of Operation Resolute Support, the NATO-led mission.

The challenges Afghanistan is facing continue to be enormously complex, and one cannot imagine a successful pact for the future of the country in the absence of unity and internal cohesion within the Government and all Afghan institutions, to which we renew our call for a constructive and inclusive approach aimed at resolving outstanding disputes, which are not compatible with the urgent needs of the country. That is also an essential prerequisite for the implementation of other indispensable reforms, as agreed with the international community, which are necessary for consolidating Afghan institutions and generating self-sustaining growth in order to meet the legitimate needs and expectations of the Afghan people. In that context, we hope that the long-awaited electoral reform agenda will soon be completed, thereby allowing the relevant institutions to rapidly set an electoral calendar and ensure a credible, inclusive and transparent process.

I wish to conclude by renewing our appreciation for the crucial work that UNAMA carries out in many areas and under very difficult conditions. Italy looks forward to engaging within the Council on the outcomes of the strategic review mandated by resolution 2344 (2017) last March, in order to further strengthen the Mission and enhance its overall effectiveness.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to thank Mr. Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for his work towards implementing the Mission's mandate. We also thank him for his informative and detailed briefing.

We commend the role of the United Nations in Afghanistan. The Secretary-General's visit to Kabul was timely and focused attention on the future of Afghanistan and of the entire Central Asia region. The visit serves as a reminder for the international community of its obligations and responsibilities towards this critical region and its future.

The security situation across Afghanistan is deteriorating, especially with the Taliban's announcement last April of the launch of its seasonal spring offensive and the increase in terrorist attacks, which have recently reached unprecedented levels. We recall the tragic attack that claimed hundreds of victims during the early days of Ramadan and other despicable terrorist attacks that occur on an almost-daily basis across the regions of Afghanistan.

We hope that Afghan militias and armed groups will follow the example set by the agreement between the Government and the Hizb-i Islami, which allowed for the return of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar to the legitimate and legal political stage after the delisting of his party from the Security Council sanctions list. It is important to fight and eliminate terrorist groups wherever they exist, particularly the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant — Khorasan Province, within the framework of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

Egypt has traditional and historical links in relations with Afghanistan and feels the influence that the political and security situations in Central Asia and the Middle East have on each other. We therefore reiterate our support for the Afghan Government in its war against terror and its effort to extend State authority across its territory. We support all regional and international efforts aimed at economic and social development in order to bring about the return and repatriation of internally displaced persons and refugees and achieve prosperity for all the people of Afghanistan.

We oppose the lenient approach towards the drug trafficking phenomenon, which is a major threat, particularly in the case of opium, to the stability and security of Afghanistan and Central Asia. We stress the importance of regional and international coordination with the Afghan authorities in the fight against trafficking in drugs, which must be part of the efforts to

fight terrorism, as drugs are a main source of funding for terrorist groups and armed militias.

In conclusion, Cairo attaches great importance to the implementation of Egypt's role as a supporting State for the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process. We also affirm the importance of following up on all of the outcomes of the ministerial conference on Afghanistan held in Brussels in October. Egypt's partnership development agency is continuing with its high-quality training programmes for elements of the Afghan police and security forces. We have also been sending Arabic experts to the University of Kabul for a number of years. We attach great importance to building Afghan capacity in the areas of the judiciary, culture, health care and nursing and agriculture and irrigation, as well as in the banking sector. And we continue to provide humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan.

Mrs. Gueguen (France) (*spoke in French*): I would first like to reiterate France's condolences to the Afghan people and the families of the victims of the terrible attack of 31 May in Kabul and the incidents that followed it. France stands with the Government of Afghanistan in the fight against terrorism.

I would like to warmly thank Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for his informative briefing, and pay tribute through him to the United Nations personnel who are working every day, in difficult conditions, for Afghanistan's recovery.

France associates itself with the statement to be delivered later by the observer of the European Union.

France is deeply concerned about the deterioration of the security situation in Afghanistan, first because the principal victims of the conflict continue to be civilians, especially women and children, and, secondly, because the increasing numbers of attacks serve only to destabilize the country even more, despite the considerable progress made by the Afghan security forces, whose commitment and courage I pay tribute to today. We should therefore treat the establishment and spread of armed and terrorist groups in Afghanistan very seriously. Lastly, the deterioration in security is exacerbating an already fragile humanitarian situation that has recently been intensified by the large-scale return of refugees from Pakistan and Iran. In that regard, France encourages the Afghan Government to focus on ensuring equal treatment for all refugees and displaced persons. We also welcome the work being done by the United Nations, particularly by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

In this highly volatile security situation, it is more important than ever for the Afghan Government to remain united. The best response to the terrorists is to display unity, to rally to the cause and to demonstrate a determination to deepen and consolidate Afghan democracy. The Government should continue to make a priority of working to achieve the reforms to which it is committed, especially electoral reform and the fight against corruption and drug trafficking, which continues to fuel the Taliban's insurgency. I would like to emphasize that last point in particular, since in view of the fact that in 2016, drug production in Afghanistan reached a new record of 4,800 tons, the Afghan authorities' implementation of its national anti-drug plan of action is urgent.

On the human rights front, the situation of women and children continues to be extremely precarious. It is vital to ensure that the Afghan authorities continue to work to fully implement their commitments to women's rights and the protection of children. Besides the Government's implementation of reforms in both the short and long term, lasting stability in Afghanistan can be achieved only through national reconciliation. France welcomed President Ghani's initiative on 6 June in convening the Kabul process for peace and security cooperation, for which we reiterate our full support. While it is up to Afghans to lead the process of restoring peace in their country, the wholehearted commitment and unambiguous support of all its neighbours is essential. We urge them to work with renewed energy and concrete efforts to that end. We have a collective responsibility to actively support the stabilization of Afghanistan and contribute to establishing lasting peace there.

In that context, support for Afghanistan by the international community in general, and the United Nations in particular, has never been so important, as the Secretary-General's recent visit emphasized. In that regard, France and the European Union continue to be fully committed to Afghanistan's cause. We await with great interest the conclusions of the strategic review of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) next month. We value the Mission's role in exercising its good offices. We also have to ask what the role of the United Nations and UNAMA in supporting Afghanistan's reconciliation and peacebuilding efforts will be. Ultimately, simplifying the coordination

mechanisms that are in place could very likely bring about an improvement in the effectiveness and visibility of United Nations assistance.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate my country's full support to Afghanistan and its Government and to the activities of the United Nations in aid of their efforts.

Mr. Herasymenko (Ukraine): I would like to start by expressing my delegation's condemnation of the recent terrorist attacks in Afghanistan, and our condolences to the relatives of the victims and to the Government of Afghanistan. We hope that those responsible will be brought to justice.

I, too, join others in expressing our gratitude to Special Representative Yamamoto and his team for their efforts in Afghanistan.

While we align ourselves with the statement to be delivered later today by the observer of the European Union, I would also like to raise several points in my national capacity.

We take positive note of the Afghan National Unity Government's recent accomplishments in addressing the country's challenges. First, we are seeing encouraging progress on the political front with high-level merit-based appointments, as well as consistent efforts to counter corruption and create an environment conducive to future parliamentary and presidential elections by strengthening electoral institutions and improving the relevant legislation.

Secondly, the Government is moving forward with justice-sector reform, particularly its anticipated revision of the penal code in order to incorporate State obligations under the Rome Statute and the United Nations conventions against corruption and torture, which will ensure that those who commit war crimes and crimes against humanity will be held accountable.

Thirdly, the protection of human rights and the promotion of gender equality have received additional impetus. The Government continues to work diligently to draft legislation aimed at combating and ending the harassment of women and children. Overall, the country's progress in the area of human rights has been impressive.

Fourthly, efforts to counter the production of illicit drugs used for financing terrorism have been resumed, resulting in the successful conduct of several counter-narcotics operations, while the eradication of opium poppy fields has almost doubled.

Lastly, the Kabul process conference held on 6 June at President Ghani's initiative should help to foster regional cooperation on peace and security.

At the same time, those achievements have been accompanied by complex internal political developments and increased tensions between political parties in anticipation of the upcoming election season. I should emphasize that it is absolutely imperative to preserve what has been achieved with such enormous effort and sacrifice. It is up to the Afghan stakeholders to demonstrate maturity and put aside their differences for the sake of achieving a sustainable and comprehensive peace and national accord.

Meanwhile, terrorism remains a major threat to Afghanistan and directly affects peace and stability in the region, with the Taliban announcing its annual offensive and affiliates of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) raising their heads. The attempts by several regional players to cooperate with certain factions and the Taliban, ostensibly with the goal of preventing ISIL from expanding its presence in Afghanistan, are alarming. We express concern at those endeavours. Tactics based on the notion that the enemy of my enemy is my friend are questionable in general and should in no way be applied to contacts with terrorists. We are of the view that such collaboration can only exacerbate the already difficult situation in the country. Let us not forget the lessons of the not-so-distant past.

It is also disturbing that, despite extensive military pressure and the attempts to eradicate the ISIL presence in Afghanistan, the group launched a series of high-profile attacks in Kabul, including on a military hospital in March and, more recently, in the heart of the diplomatic district in May. All of that creates an atmosphere of fear and terror, thereby contributing to instability and prolonged conflict, and provokes social frustration and protest, as we saw recently in the capital. In that light, we call on the Afghan authorities to conduct a thorough investigation into those attacks so as to prevent their recurrence in future, as well as to improve the protection of diplomatic missions and their personnel.

Let me also take this opportunity to echo and support the call of the Afghan Ambassador on the Council to strictly enforce and strengthen the sanctions regime.

We are also concerned by the continued suffering of civilians, especially the high number of losses among women and children as a result of the fighting, as well as from landmines and explosive remnants of war. We note the Government's commitment to the prevention and the mitigation of civilian casualties, as well as its intention to ratify Protocol V to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. In that regard, we call on international humanitarian demining actors, in particular the United Nations Mine Action Service, to work together with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) with a view to promoting mine-risk education programmes and assisting the Government in conducting mine-clearance operations.

The growing number of internally displaced persons, as well as of refugees repatriated to Afghanistan, is another point of concern. The International Organization for Migration estimates that at least 600,000 refugees could return this year. Yet the reports by UNAMA about the sharp increase in civilian casualties during clashes between the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces and the Taliban show how unsafe this situation is for the affected population. In that regard, we also regret that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees had to significantly cut cash grants, from $400 to $200, to Afghan returnees while they continue to struggle with severe food insecurity.

Regional cooperation is crucial for stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan. In order to bring sustainable peace and prosperity to the country, key stakeholders have to spare no effort in confronting the major regional threat posed by terrorism. We agree with the Secretary-General's findings that this goal can be achieved with the improvement of bilateral relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan through a constructive dialogue. We commend the readiness of the Afghan leadership to extend the hand of friendship and to seek ways of improving bilateral relations with neighbours by developing mutual security cooperation. In this vein, it is imperative to strengthen border controls to cut terrorist flows and to deprive Taliban fighters of shelter or any kind of assistance.

We also hope that the arrangements made at the Kabul process conference on 6 June will help to reboot peace talks and enlist neighbours in a regional fight against terrorism. In that regard, we urge the guarantors in the Quadrilateral Coordination Group to assist in accomplishing these endeavours.

In conclusion, Ukraine would like to reiterate its strong support for UNAMA activities in assisting Afghanistan to cope with security, economic and development challenges, as well as to enact national reforms aimed at creating a sound foundation for peace, security and prosperity, both in the country and in the wider region. We expect that the strategic review of UNAMA's mandate, priorities and related resources, as requested by resolution 2344 (2017) and to be completed by this July, will result in enhanced Mission efficiency. Our common goal is to make irreversible the process of transformation of Afghanistan into a steady and prosperous nation that lives in peace and harmony with all of its neighbours.

Ms. Carrión (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr. Yamamoto, for his comprehensive briefing. We also thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2017/508), which reflects the complex situation that Afghanistan continues to face, as well as for his recent visit to the country.

Uruguay reaffirms its support for the Government of Afghanistan and encourages it to continue its efforts to achieve lasting peace based on the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity. The consolidation of democratic institutions remains essential to the achievement of stability. The progress made in relation to the Government's programme of priority reforms is encouraging, in particular the fight against corruption, the improved accountability on the part of senior officials and electoral preparations.

It is nonetheless discouraging that the lack of dialogue and progress towards a peace agreement between the Afghan Government and the Taliban continue to cause great suffering to the Afghan people. It is worrying that, according to the report, security-related incidents have reached the highest recorded number since 2001. The situation of instability and insecurity continues to expose the vulnerability of civilians. The fighting continues to cause a large number of casualties among the civilian population, particularly women and children, who, as usual, are disproportionately affected by the upsurge in violence. The number of victims among women and children has been increasing due to the effects of aerial operations,

attacks with improvised explosive devices and suicide bombings.

It is worth recalling the 31 May attack on in Kabul, which resulted in a large number of fatalities and hundreds of wounded. In that connection, we wish to express our heartfelt condolences to the Afghan people and Government.

The serious human rights situation and humanitarian issues arising from the rapid increase in the number of newly internally displaced persons caused by the intensification of the conflict, to which can be added the large number of refugees returning to the country, are also alarming.

Uruguay reiterates its vigorous condemnation and repudiation of terrorist violence, and reiterates as well that violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law must not go unpunished.

The political, economic and security challenges that continue to confront Afghanistan require the continued support of the countries of the region, the international community, the United Nations and, in particular, the Security Council. In that regard, we express our appreciation for the work of the Kabul process, which was recently launched. Similarly, we would like to recognize, and express our appreciation for, the work of Special Representative and the entire staff of UNAMA, who with their unwavering dedication continue to support the Afghan people. We would also like to thank to all those involved in providing humanitarian aid, who often work in extremely difficult conditions, which include being directly targeted by attacks.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my national capacity as the representative of the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

Bolivia thanks the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, for his detailed briefing and presentation of the report (S/2017/508) of the Secretary-General on Afghanistan, and welcomes this opportunity to express its overwhelming support for his work. Similarly, Bolivia thanks the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan for the information that he provided to the members of the Security Council today. Through its Ambassador, Bolivia reiterates its condolences to the Government and the people of Afghanistan for the victims of the recent terrorist attacks that Afghanistan has endured. Those responsible for those acts must be brought to justice and punished to the full extent of the law.

Bolivia commends the visit by the Secretary-General to Afghanistan and shares his concern about the proliferation of various terrorist groups in Afghan territory and the need for a more coordinated international response to counter terrorism. We also underscore the Secretary-General's reference to the need for the United Nations to continue support for the Kabul process, led by Afghanistan and in line with the strategy of the Afghan Government.

We would be remiss if we did not mention our concern about the high number of internally displaced persons. According to the report presented by Mr. Yamamoto, between January and mid-May more than 100,000 people became internally displaced within the country. We call for concerted efforts aimed at the sustainable return of citizens, with international organizations providing concrete and tangible support, in particular for enhancing assistance to internally displaced Afghans and Afghan refugees so as to facilitate their voluntary, safe and dignified return and their sustainable reinsertion into their society of origin so that they can contribute to the stability of Afghanistan.

We commend the work of United Nations Mine Action Service, which has been working to provide education at transit centres to ensure that returnees are informed of the existence and danger of antipersonnel mines, explosive remnants of war and other improvised explosive devices. We also highlight that 18 communities have been declared mine-free, thereby making it possible for approximately 20,000 people in an area of nearly 10 square kilometres to move freely about their community.

With respect to political events, we recognize the major efforts made by the Government and the people of Afghanistan, and we reiterate our commitment to defend the country's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. We recall the interconnected nature of the challenges facing the people of Afghanistan and sustainable progress relating to security, development and governance, which are mutually reinforcing.

With regard to the report of the Secretary-General, it is very important to highlight the work on the peace agreement between various factions, such as Hizb-i Islami, and on negotiations to release prisoners. We recognize and express our gratitude for the efforts of

the Government, which devised a road map in April based on the need for a process of inclusive dialogue that brings all parties involved to the negotiating table wiht a view to strengthen institutions through which differences of a political nature can be channelled.

Bolivia is also grateful to UNAMA for its logistical and technical work in a broad-based, Afghan-led process in support of new local peace initiatives in nine different provinces aimed at the non-violent settlement of disputes and conflicts.

UNAMA recorded 5,687 security-related incidents in Afghanistan between January and March of this year — an unprecedented number, including in areas that previously had been considered secure. We strongly condemn the attacks of recent days, and we call on the international community to take firm measures so as to ensure the strengthening of, and support for the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces and to achieve a stable and democratic Afghanistan — to which end there is a need to shore up its ability to maintain security and stability in the entire country.

We welcome the multilateral and bilateral initiatives mentioned in the report, such as the various regional initiatives in Central Asia and the conferences on Afghanistan held in Moscow in April and in Kabul on 6 June — otherwise known as the Kabul process — which proposed to coordinate efforts at the regional level and make it possible for our brotherly country to emerge from the situation which it is undergoing.

We reiterate the crucial importance of encouraging regional cooperation as an effective means to promote security, stability and economic and social development in Afghanistan, while recognizing the importance of the contributions of neighbouring and regional partners.

Lastly, we must recall that the conflict has been ongoing for several years, and different types of solutions, including a military solution, have been tried. We have come to a point where there are now more than 100,000 troops in Afghan territory, while, at the same time, terrorist groups have multiplied, with the increased presence of groups like Da'esh. We therefore call on the entire international community, in particular countries in the region, to contribute positively so that the Government and the people of Afghanistan, as well as the groups involved, can achieve a reconciliation that is inclusive of everyone.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): We thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2017/508), and Special Representative Yamamoto for his comprehensive briefing this morning. These reports and the Secretary-General's own conclusions following his visit to Kabul last week confirm the growing concern, if not alarm, at the deteriorating political, economic and security situation in Afghanistan.

Pakistan strongly condemns the repeated, large-scale and orchestrated terrorist attacks in Kabul and elsewhere in Afghanistan. There can be no justification for the murder and mayhem aimed at innocent civilians. Pakistan is also a principal victim of terrorism. We share the pain and the agony of the Afghan people and wish to work with them to defeat and eliminate the scourge of terrorism and violence from Afghanistan and our region.

We hope that the political differences that have become more pronounced recently within the Afghan Government will be reconciled by President Ghani Ahmadzai, Chief Executive Abdullah and other political leaders and groups. The continued economic and political support to the Afghan Government from the international community remains essential for the preservation of political amity and the implementation of much-needed governance reforms.

Besides internal differences, Afghanistan's security faces a twin challenge: the insurgency led by the Tehrik-e-Taliban Afghanistan, on the one hand, and the campaign of terrorism promoted by the so-called Islamic State, or Da'esh, on the other. Several terrorist groups are now associated with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham, including Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement, among other terrorist groups. Those violent groups not only threaten Afghanistan and its neighbours, but also pose a global terrorist threat.

It has been my country's consistent view that peace can be restored in Afghanistan only — and this I emphasize — through a negotiated settlement between Kabul and the Afghan Taliban. That has also long been the consensus of the international community — one that we saw expressed this morning. A negotiated peace

was also the conclusion reached by the Secretary-General following his visit to Afghanistan last week.

Over the years, Pakistan has done what it could, when asked, to help facilitate such a negotiated settlement. Pakistan initiated the Murree talks in July 2015, which were scuttled by a series of well-known developments. Thereafter, we sought to resuscitate the talks under the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG).

Pakistan has continued to engage in all other processes designed to promote a political solution: the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process, the 6+1 peace formula, the International Contact Group for Afghanistan, the QCG, the Moscow format of regional consultations on Afghanistan and, most recently, the Kabul process. We believe that the promotion of a political settlement and the pursuit of a military solution in Afghanistan are mutually incompatible. Continued reliance on a military option or an enhancement in troop numbers without an accompanying political strategy will not produce a result different from the one witnessed in the past 15 or 16 years. It will instead lead to more violence and bloodshed for the Afghan people; it will not yield a political solution.

Nor can, in our opinion, the resilience of the insurgency be explained away by convenient references to external safe havens or support centres. Given that large areas of Afghanistan are now under the control of the Afghan Taliban, their safe havens are inside, not outside, Afghanistan. As a country that continues to host over 2 million Afghan refugees, and many more who are undocumented, Pakistan expects the gratitude, not the hostility, of the Afghan Government. On our part, Pakistan's successive military operations have managed to crush or expel all terrorist and militant groups from our tribal territory, which borders Afghanistan.

Despite the provocative remarks made by my colleague from Afghanistan, my country remains committed to not allowing its territory to be used for terrorism against any other country. We are implementing border controls, including the fencing and monitoring of vulnerable sections of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Any issue relating to cross-border terrorism and cross-border violations can be raised and discussed in the coordination mechanisms, including the bilateral mechanism for intelligence-sharing and cooperation in border management, established in March.

In Astana earlier this month, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and President Ashraf Ghani agreed to re-energize Pakistan-Afghanistan cooperation so as to eliminate the menace of terrorism from our region. They also agreed to revitalize the QCG to promote peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan. We urge all parties — in particular the Tehrik-e-Taliban Afghanistan and all its constituent groups — to return to the path of negotiations in response to the call made by the Secretary-General. Pakistan and Afghanistan's other friends can assist in promoting a negotiated settlement. But peace can be negotiated only — only — when the Afghan parties desire it and they agree to eschew a military solution.

Today there is every reason for the Afghan parties and their friends to pursue the path of a negotiated peace. All of them face a common threat from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham and the terrorist groups affiliated with it. Among them, the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan and the Jamaat ul-Ahrar target Pakistan from their bases in Afghanistan. Those groups must be rooted out from their bases as part of an effective counter-terrorism campaign in Afghanistan.

In conclusion, apart from Afghanistan itself, Pakistan has suffered more from the wars and violence that have engulfed Afghanistan for over 35 years than any other country. No country other than mine would gain more from peace in Afghanistan. We are confident that, whatever our differences in the past, in the end the deep bonds of religion, culture, history and geography between Pakistan and Afghanistan will assert themselves and produce an era of peaceful and mutually beneficial cooperation between our fraternal nations.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Sinirlioğlu (Turkey): We thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his briefing, and the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Saikal, for his statement.

At the outset, let me reiterate our heartfelt condolences for those who lost their lives in the series of terrorist attacks that began on 31 May in Kabul. We once again strongly condemn those heinous acts of terror. Turkey will continue its support to the Government of Afghanistan in its fight against terrorism and in its efforts to bring peace, security and stability to the country

I would also like to take this opportunity to commend the members of the diplomatic community in Kabul for their perseverance in the execution of their duties despite all the challenges they face. We also commend the role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in standing with the Afghan people and coordinating the efforts of the international stakeholders in Afghanistan. We will continue to support UNAMA's activities and efforts in that regard.

I would like to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2017/508). We share his concerns regarding the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan. We also applaud the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) for their determined stance against terrorism. We acknowledge the sacrifices of the ANDSF.

The presence of Da'esh in the country is also a cause for serious concern and constitutes yet another reason to continue supporting Afghanistan.

The achievements of the past 15 years need to be consolidated. The continued support of the international community during the transformation decade is crucial. We are pleased to see that the international community reiterated its support for Afghanistan in the NATO Warsaw Summit and the Brussels Conference last year. It is imperative to live up to the commitments made to Afghanistan.

Turkey upheld its previous development contributions and pledged another $150 million for the period 2018-2020. We are also providing $60 million to sustain the ANDSF for the period 2018-2020, in line with the NATO Warsaw Summit decisions. We will contiue to support the Afghan Government's security and development efforts, both bilaterally and on multilateral platforms. In that context, our support through the NATO Resolute Support mission and the training of Afghan women police officers in Turkey will continue.

In line with the international community's continued support to Afghanistan, we welcome the anti-corruption efforts of the Afghan Government. We attach importance to the functioning of the National Unity Government, as it symbolizes Afghan unity. The international community should continue to support the National Unity Government and encourage its components to work in harmony with each other.

We are closely following the developments regarding First Vice-President Dostum, who is currently in Turkey for medical purposes. He will return to Afghanistan upon completion of those medical procedures. We agree that upholding the rule of law and eliminating impunity are imperative for stability in Afghanistan. However, the case against First Vice-President Dostum might not be the most appropriate occasion to prove that point. The case needs to be handled in a way that will not put at risk the support provided to the National Unity Government or create further deterioration of the security situation, especially in northern Afghanistan.

We support Afghan-led and -owned peace and reconciliation efforts, which aim at achieving lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan. The first meeting of the Kabul process for eace and security cooperation conference, held on 6 June, was a positive development in that direction. The meeting also provided the international community with an opportunity to display its solidarity with Afghanistan in a difficult period. We hope that the agreement between the Afghan Government and Hezb-i Islami will serve as a model for others. The progress made in the implementation of the agree nt is encouraging, and we were pleased to see them participating in the Kabul process meeting.

Enhanced cooperation and increased dialogue among the countries of the region is also necessary. In fact, it is the region itself that has the greatest role, interest and responsibility in establishing and sustaining a secure, prosperous and peaceful Afghanistan. In that regard, Turkey will continue its contributions to Afghanistan, inter alia within the multilateral platforms, including through the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Braun (Germany): To start, let me thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Mr. Yamamoto, for his comprehensive briefing and both him and his staff for their tireless efforts.

Germany aligns itself with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the European Union.

Afghanistan finds itself in a tense political situation. The despicable attack in the vicinity of the German Embassy in Kabul on 31 May was one of the deadliest suicide attacks in Afghan history, leaving

over 80 dead and more than 400 injured. The Permanent Representative of Afghanistan provided some details in his statement earlier today. We condemn in the strongest terms the senseless killing of so many innocent victims. As in numerous similar attacks in the past, once again civilians were the targets most affected. We call on the Afghan authorities to conduct a thorough criminal investigation and to hold those responsible accountable for their crimes.

Those perverse attacks, carried out in the holy month of Ramadan, resulted in far too many casualties and caused significant damage to our Embassy. Numerous other diplomatic missions and non-governmental organizations were also affected. But that heinous act only strengthens our resolve. Germany remains strongly committed to working side by side with our Afghan partners to tackle the challenges before us.

We commend the National Unity Government for keeping its doors open to peace negotiations with the Taliban. A comprehensive peace and reconciliation process remains the only way to long-term stability in Afghanistan and the region. Only an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process will result in a sustainable solution. Germany continues to stand ready to assist Afghanistan in the process. The Kabul process is the Afghan-led solution on the way towards peace.

The fragile security situation remains the main challenge in Afghanistan. As Secretary-General Guterres points out in his report (S/2017/508), the number of casualties among women and children increased by 24 per cent and 17 per cent, respectively. More needs to be done to protect the most vulnerable in Afghan society. The adoption of a national civilian casualty prevention and mitigation strategy by the Government is an important step in the right direction. It now needs to be implemented with vigour. In addition, the imminent ratification of Protocol V to the 1980 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons will also help reduce the number of civilian fatalities.

Furthermore, we encourage the National Unity Government to proceed with electoral reforms. For some months now, Afghanistan has had the necessary institutions in place for the holding of parliamentary and district council elections. A clear and realistic timetable is crucial for pushing through the remaining electoral reforms and for holding credible, fair, equal and free elections.

Let me conclude by reiterating Germany's full support for the crucial role played by UNAMA and United Nations agencies working in Afghanistan. As co-Chair of the International Contact Group on Afghanistan, Germany especially commends UNAMA's efforts to strengthen cohesion among international and regional stakeholders in Afghanistan. We look forward to receiving the results of the strategic review of the Mission requested by the Security Council. The review should be conducted with the aim of optimizing ongoing activities and strengthening the Mission even further. Germany remains committed to supporting Afghanistan, in close cooperation with the Afghan Government and our international partners.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Netherlands.

Ms. Samson (Netherlands): I thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to speak at today's debate on behalf of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union and joins others in thanking the Secretary-General for his detailed and thorough report (S/2017/508).

I would also like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his dedicated work, and Ambassador Saikal for his statement.

Allow me to focus on three issues: the security situation and political stability in Afghanistan; reconciliation and meaningful participation by women in Afghan society; and the review of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

First, the attack on the army base in Mazar-i-Sharif and the recent attacks in Kabul are a stark reminder of the suffering that the Afghan people and the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces have had to endure in ever-greater numbers. The Kingdom of the Netherlands is deeply saddened by the loss of life. We express our condolences and support to all affected by such violence. In such challenging security conditions, good governance and political stability are essential for maintaining nationwide stability. We continue to stand with the National Unity Government in facing those challenges.

Secondly, in order to realize long-term stability in the region, peace talks remain an important objective. We join others in calling upon all parties involved to cooperate within the framework of an Afghan-led and

Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process. The constructive engagement of regional partners is also of paramount importance.

During the Kabul process on 6 June, President Ghani Ahmadzai reaffirmed his commitment to the peace process and to the start of a national dialogue. The Kingdom of the Netherlands welcomes his strong personal commitment. We commend President Ghani Ahmadzai for his efforts to encourage the meaningful participation of women, civil society organizations and young Afghans in the process. If all Afghans are represented in the peace talks — formal or informal — sustainable peace can be reached.

However, there will be no peace in Afghanistan without the active participation of women. We applaud the results of the fourth Kabul National Symposium on Afghan Women, held on the theme "Afghan Women: Messengers of Peace" on 15 May. We commend the leadership of Afghanistan's First Lady, Rula Ghani, in her efforts to increase the political participation of women in Afghanistan by boosting the number of women taking part in provincial councils and provincial peace councils. We call upon the Afghan Government and all stakeholders involved to implement resolution 1325 (2000) as a matter of the utmost priority.

Thirdly, the Kingdom of the Netherlands strongly supports UNAMA's work in accordance with its current nationwide mandate. We would like to reiterate our appreciation for the implementation of the broad United Nations mandate throughout Afghanistan. UNAMA's regional presence is crucial for its success, and we emphasize the need for a strong regional United Nations presence throughout the country. We hope that the UNAMA review will support that notion and safeguard UNAMA's regional presence in Afghanistan.

We would like to underline the importance of UNAMA's role in regional political cooperation. We support UNAMA as it takes on a stronger role in such processes. We would also like to underscore our appreciation for UNAMA's thorough reporting on the human rights situation and on civilian casualties.

In conclusion, the international community should not waver and should remain fully committed to the situation in Afghanistan. UNAMA is a key partner in achieving long-term stability in Afghanistan. The Kingdom of the Netherlands remains dedicated to supporting Afghanistan throughout the transformation decade. During its membership of the Security Council in 2018, the Kingdom of the Netherlands will continue to support Afghanistan with the same vision and commitment.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Spain.

Mr. González de Linares Palou (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): Believe me, Mr. President, when I say that I regret having yet again to begin a statement by expressing my delegation's consternation and deepest sympathy following the reprehensible terrorist attacks that have rocked Afghanistan in the past few weeks. Through the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, who is here with us today, I would like to convey our solidarity with the victims and our gratitude to, and support for, the Afghan Government in its resolute efforts to combat the scourge of terrorism.

Spain fully subscribes to the statement to be delivered shortly by the observer of the European Union, but I would also like to make a couple of comments in my national capacity.

I would first like to commend the Secretary-General for his recent trip to Kabul, just a few days ago, which once again served to emphasize the international community's strong support for Afghanistan and the solidarity of the States Members of the United Nations with the Afghan nation and its people.

The challenges facing Afghanistan right now are numerous and significant. They include maintaining security and combating terrorism and insurgency; effectively implementing the reform agenda and achieving sustained economic growth that has an impact on citizens' daily lives; preparing for the next elections and consolidating democracy and institutionality through an inclusive political process; managing the humanitarian crisis posed by the situation of internally displaced persons; and combating the festering wounds that drug production and trafficking have inflicted on the country's economy. While much progress has been made in the past few years, much remains to be done. The report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/508) and today's briefing by Ambassador Yamamoto, his Special Representative, show that the reality is far from positive. However, as the Secretary-General pointed out during his visit to Kabul, the resolute commitment of the citizens of Afghanistan to moving forward despite the difficulties is clear. The international community cannot be less stubborn.

I would like to emphasize Spain's support to the Afghan authorities in their determined efforts in all those areas, and at the same time to urge all political stakeholders to keep the progress and well-being of all Afghans at the forefront of their minds in order to ensure that it is that goal that ultimately guides their actions. I want to particularly encourage efforts to achieve reconciliation and support the quest for peace. When that goal is reached, while at the same time the achievements relating to respect for the rule of law and human rights and the equality of all Afghans are maintained, the other challenges I mentioned can be tackled in the full certainty of success. That peace, moreover, will redound positively to the benefit of the citizens of the entire region, not just of Afghanistan. We welcome the recent regional initiatives for peace and urge all actors in the region to commit unreservedly to supporting all efforts to end the conflict and achieve reconciliation.

I would like to conclude by reiterating Spain's firm and resolute support for the work of United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and all the United Nations agencies and programmes that benefit Afghanistan and all Afghans. We await with great interest the results of the strategic review of the Mission, which is called on to contribute to the international effort in support of Afghanistan through better and more efficient use of available resources, while also strengthening Afghanistan's ownership of its own future.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Akbaruddin (India): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing today's debate on the situation in Afghanistan. We also appreciate the briefing by Special Representative Yamamoto and the statement by Ambassador Mahmoud Saikal, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, which have added to our understanding of the current crises in Afghanistan.

The recent flurry of terrorist attacks in Afghanistan, including the massive Kabul bomb attack, have left many of us horror-struck. Clearly, in Afghanistan the international community is dealing with an adversary not averse to flagrantly violating international humanitarian law and human rights laws — an adversary flush with resources, weapons and operational support; an adversary with access to sanctuaries outside the sovereignty of Afghanistan and operational command of the international forces deployed there; an adversary that sees no reason or incentive to give up violence and participate in creation of a democratic, united, stable, secure and prosperous State. Unfortunately, the multiple crises that have been inflicted on this war-torn country have once again made Afghan territory attractive to criminal and terrorist groups that now appear to be well connected to international terror and crime networks that in turn prey on Afghanistan's resources. The situation is affecting security in South Asia, Central Asia and regions beyond.

More often than not, a crisis can be seen as a catalyst for real change and genuine solutions. However, for that to happen, our perceptions must be straight and forthright. After all, we cannot change what we cannot see, or what we are unwilling to see. For a long time, we believe, that has been the conundrum facing the international community in Afghanistan — that the international community's collective inability and unwillingness to see the problem for what it is has inflicted huge costs on the people of Afghanistan.

While no two conflicts are identical, one wonders why, despite the fact that we have witnessed the worst possible violence in Afghanistan, the Council does not think it appropriate to meet more often than in routine quarterly debates on the situation there. At times it has even shied away from condemning some of the terrorist attacks in Afghanistan. Is it that there are far too many to keep track of? Is it because there is a threshold below which human lives lost to terrorism are not required to be addressed?

We see a growing tendency to treat the violence in Afghanistan as routine. Brutality committed by terrorist and criminal networks are ignored, labelled as a product of anti-Government elements or the inevitable consequence of a civil and political conflict. In doing so we seem to be failing to ask some crucial questions. For example, where are those anti-Government elements getting their weapons, explosives, training and funding? Where do they find safe havens and sanctuary? How is it that they have resisted one of the biggest collective military efforts in the world? How is it that they collaborate with the world's most dreadful terrorists in killing and brutalizing Afghans? How is it that the phenomenal increase in opium production, accompanied by a rise in global narcotic prices, has been totally ignored by the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011)? Why is the 1988 sanctions regime still maintained when there is no effort

to use its leverage for progress in the peace process? Why do we hear nothing about the stalled peace process from those involved, or about the activities of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group? Why are we not hearing discussions in the Security Council about ideas and plans of action for a conflict that has left many Afghan lives shattered and brutalized?

In the past few months, the attacks on hospitals, schools, funerals, international development agencies and diplomatic missions seem to have been designed to send a message to a nation trying to stand on its feet. We salute the Afghan national security forces, which are doing their best to combat the forces of terrorism and extremism as they continue to strike, one after another. India remains committed to standing with Afghanistan and to supporting and strengthening its capabilities, not just for fighting terrorism and violence but also to assist it with development and nation-building. Our efforts to that end will be improved by the opening of a direct air corridor between our two countries, as agreed on between our two Heads of State in December. The first cargoes of goods arrived in both countries a few days ago, overcoming the obstructions that we have faced in connecting and trading directly with each other.

While we welcome the efforts to renew the United Nations approach to dealing with Afghanistan through the upcoming strategic review of UNAMA, such efforts should be guided by the needs and priorities of Afghanistan, its people and its Government. We would appreciate broader and more informal discussions on the matter with all important stakeholders.

In this regard, we must not differentiate between good and bad terrorists or play one group against the other. The Taliban, the Haggani Network, Al-Qaida, Da'esh, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed and others of their ilk are all terror organizations, many of them proscribed by the United Nations. They should be treated like terrorist organizations, with no justifications offered for their activities.

India, for its part, will continue to stand, in the words of our Prime Minister, not behind but shoulder to shoulder with the democratically elected Government of Afghanistan as it battles terror and the multiple crises inflicted on it. We hope that the Council, which is tasked with the responsibility of maintaining international peace and security, will also play its role in restoring peace in Afghanistan.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khoshroo (Islamic Republic of Iran): Let me begin by expressing my heartfelt condolences and condemnation in connection with the most recent terrorist attacks that took place during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan in Kabul, which resulted in considerable damage to surrounding areas and some diplomatic facilities, including ours, as well as the attack on a Shia mosque on 15 June.

As the Secretary-General observed during his first visit to Kabul, peace remains the foundation for Afghanistan's sustainable development. At the same time, according to his report (S/2017/508), the security situation in Afghanistan remains extremely volatile, with 6,252 security-related incidents from 1 March to 31 May this year, a 2 per cent increase compared with last year. This is the highest total ever recorded for this period of time since 2001.

More than a decade after its invasion, Afghanistan, the region and the world are no safer. The deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan has deep roots and cannot be addressed solely through military buildup. The Taliban, Da'esh and its offshoots, such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant — Khorasan Province, continue their heinous attacks against the civilian population. They are reinforcing and recruiting, and continuing complex attacks such as those of 17 May and 31 May attacks, in Jalalabad and Kabul. The proliferation of terrorist groups on Afghan territory necessitates concerted international efforts on counter-terrorism. We need to deal with this increasing threat in a very comprehensive and resolute manner. The sustained support of the international community for the Afghan National Unity Government is more than ever necessary to help the Government in its fight against terrorism and extremism and those who have created and continue to support them.

Our support for the Afghan National Unity Government is unswerving. We welcome any achievement on the path to an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process leading to lasting and comprehensive peace in the country and the region. The progress achieved in the implementation of the peace agreement between the Government and Hizb-i Islami is an indication of the Government's will to establish peace.

Iran is indeed very eager to see a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan as its neighbour, as security in Afghanistan directly and indirectly affects security on our borders and in the region. It was in this context that Iran welcomed and participated in the conference hosted by the Russian Federation on 14 April in Moscow, as well as the Kabul process meeting hosted by the Afghan Government on 6 June.

The full text of my statement, dealing with regional economic cooperation, combating narcotic drugs and the problem of refugees, will be distributed.

Finally, we support the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) as well as United Nations agencies in their efforts to provide development and reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan through a genuine commitment by the United Nations to a sustained partnership with that country. We must utilize the UNAMA mandate and its good offices to strengthen national institutions and capacities in priority areas, as requested by the Government.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Ms. Adamson (European Union): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its 28 member States.

The candidate countries Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania, the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

I shall read out a shortened version of my statement; the full version of the text will be distributed.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2017/508). I would also like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his briefing.

First of all, I would like to express the EU's most sincere condolences to the Afghan people and Government for the recent horrific terrorist attacks in Kabul. At the same time, I would like to confirm the EU's unwavering engagement to stand by Afghanistan in the fight against the global threat of terrorism. At the same time, the EU calls for an in-depth investigation of these crimes and the identification of the perpetrators, who should be brought to justice.

As stated on several occasions, the EU strongly acknowledges the crucial role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and all the United Nations agencies in supporting the Afghan people, encouraging peace and reconciliation, monitoring and promoting human rights, and coordinating the international community's assistance.

The Brussels Conference on Afghanistan, held in October last year, demonstrated a very strong international commitment to Afghanistan. At the conference, the international community sent a clear signal in support of peace, security and stability in Afghanistan. We should continue to build on this emerging consensus on regional and international support for the peace and reconciliation process. The EU stands ready to do its part in this political process.

All international efforts, whether they be security-related, political, economic, developmental or regional, should now be aligned to promote such a political process. Terrorism and violent extremism are fundamental threats to all State actors, undermining regional peace and stability.

The European Union remains fully committed to supporting an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. Such a process must include all Afghan men and women and their legitimate interests and must preserve Afghanistan's unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity as well as the equal rights of all Afghans under the Constitution of Afghanistan. We welcome the recently launched new regional peace initiative, the Kabul process on peace and security cooperation.

We welcome the undeterred willingness of the Afghan Government to engage in a political process with the Taliban and other Afghan groups opposing the Kabul Government to reach a lasting political settlement. We welcome all initiatives aimed at creating a conducive environment for such a process and call on all parties to engage in constructive solutions.

We also welcome the work that has been done by the Afghan Government to advance the implementation of its commitments and the progress achieved on anti-corruption, election preparation, revenue collection and budget execution. This must now be followed by further tangible results in the implementation of the reform agenda. On 18 February, the signature between

the EU and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan of their first contractual relationship, the Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development, sent a strong political signal of the EU's enduring support for the country. We hope that Afghanistan can ratify the agreement soon, to start the provisional application and to set up the institutional structures.

The EU and its member States welcome the Government's efforts to move ahead with the delayed parliamentary and district council elections. We nevertheless note that the key decisions to start fully the electoral preparations are still pending. We urge the Government to take the necessary decisions promptly, and the electoral management bodies to implement the electoral process in a professional, transparent and inclusive manner. That will help in rebuilding public confidence. While technical aspects of elections play an important role, the political will of Afghan stakeholders and a strong and cohesive leadership are necessary to deliver credible elections. The EU supports the electoral process capacity-building and institutional strengthening of the electoral management bodies and UNAMA's coordinating role.

On behalf of the EU and its member States, I would like to reiterate that joint Statebuilding and development efforts in Afghanistan need to build on reinforced regional cooperation. Regional cooperation remains key to lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan and the region. The treats of terrorism affecting all countries of the region can be confronted only with increased security cooperation. In the same vein, it is indispensable for sustainable development.

Migration continues to represent a common concern on which the dialogue between the EU and Afghanistan proceeds in a meaningful way. In the framework of the joint way forward, a political engagement to enhance cooperation on migration and re-admission, both sides have reaffirmed their commitment to deepen cooperation on the basis of solidarity and information-sharing.

At the same time, the EU monitors the Afghan refugees' regional dimension. We raise this issue continuously during our political dialogues with relevant partners. The EU supports a regional approach in dealing with this issue, and our actions focus on addressing the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement. We also want to focus on the long-term reintegration of returned migrants. Let me reassure the Council that the EU will continue its work and engagement in these areas.

In that context, UNAMA should be encouraged to uphold its work and the dialogue with the Afghan Government on the inclusion of internally displaced persons and returnees. The EU aims to develop a comprehensive EU response to bridge the humanitarian-development nexus and promote durable solutions to the challenges posed by the protracted nature of the crisis.

Although UNAMA's 2017 first quarterly report on civilian casualties in Afghanistan documents a 4 per cent decrease in the number of civilian casualties compared to the same period in 2016, we are concerned by increases in both child and women civilian casualties. We call on all parties to do their utmost to protect the civilian population, especially women and children. We also need to continue to protect the vital role of humanitarian agencies and respect their impartiality and humanitarian space in addressing the most urgent needs of the vulnerable. In view of the threat posed by the many mines and improvised explosive devices to the population, the EU also encourages Afghanistan to maintain the current demining rhythm.

In conclusion, it is important that the international community remain strongly committed to support Afghanistan towards long-term stability. The EU continues to consider UNAMA as a key partner in achieving lasting peace in Afghanistan. UNAMA has an invaluable role in ensuring the broadest possible international support for an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process. The EU will continue to support those efforts with all means at its disposal.

In that regard, I would like to inform colleagues that the European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Ms. Federica Mogherini, has today announced the appointment of Mr. Roland Kobia as the Special Envoy of the European Union to Afghanistan. His main task will be to advance the EU's contribution to delivering lasting peace and prosperity in Afghanistan and the region.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Belgium.

Mr. Bogaert (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Secretary-General for his quarterly report on the situation in Afghanistan (S/2017/508), as well as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for his

briefing and his commitment in support of Afghanistan during this critical phase.

First of all, like those who have spoken before me, I wish to extend my deepest condolences to the Afghan people and the Government for the victims of the recent terrorist attacks in Kabul. Belgium will continue to stand firm with Afghanistan in the fight against terrorism.

We welcome the Secretary-General's recent visit to Afghanistan, which was an expression of international solidarity for Afghanistan and reflects the continuing international commitment to the lasting and peaceful stabilization of the country. We fully support the messages and appeals of the Secretary-General, as well as those of his Special Representative, with respect to preparations for the elections, the importance of an Afghan-led peace process, the need for a concerted international effort against terrorism and the need to successfully integrate a significant number of returnees. Those are key elements for the transition to succeed and overcome the very real challenges and risks.

On its part, Belgium remains committed to contributing to international community efforts in support of Afghanistan. In particular, we wish to salute the Afghan Government for launching the Kabul process. We are also pleased at the announcement just made as to the imminent announcement concerning the date of parliamentary elections.

I would like to focus my remarks today on three points.

First of all, we stress the importance of lasting action against landmines in Afghanistan. Last week, Mr. President, you organized an important briefing on mine action in the Security Council (see S/PV.7966). Despite the enormous efforts undertaken by the Afghan Government, with the support of the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) and other international partners, Afghanistan remains one of the countries in the world most affected by this scourge. Anti-personnel mines, improvised explosive devices and explosive remnants of war cause countless civilian casualties and disproportionately affect children.

More than 80 per cent of victims of unexploded ordnance are children. The challenge facing Afghanistan in terms of achieving its mine-clearance obligations under the Ottawa Convention by 2023 is a substantial one. I am pleased to announce that Belgium recently decided to support a new UNMAS project to strengthen the capacity of the Afghan National Mine Action Authority to coordinate and manage the quality of all mine action activities in the country.

Secondly, I would like to express our deep concern about the increased impact of conflict on children. During the first quarter of 2017, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) unfortunately documented a sharp increase in the number of child victims. While anti-Government forces are responsible for the vast majority of recruitment into armed groups, torture and other violations against children, we also call on the Government to step up its efforts to implement its commitments.

UNAMA reported progress with respect to detention practices concerning children, but it is still important to fully implement the directives issued by the National Security Directorate. Too many schools continued to be used for military purposes. We call on the Secretary-General to maintain a special child-protection unit within UNAMA. We also wish to reiterate our call on all parties to the conflict to fully respect their obligations under international humanitarian law.

Thirdly, and lastly, it is clear that the national peace process and concerted action at the regional and international levels, including the recently launched Kabul process, are essential to make meaningful progress in the fight against terrorism. I would also like to reiterate the importance of a comprehensive national plan of action against violent extremism in order to effectively combat terrorism. Ground-level understanding of the factors influencing radicalization and recruitment, as well as an adequate understanding of terrorist financing networks and religious dialogue, are key elements for effective action. Belgium commends the Government of Afghanistan for its significant efforts to date, such as the action plan to combat the financing of terrorism. Several speakers mentioned drug trafficking, which plays a significant role in that regard. Belgium encourages the Government to continue to work on a national plan of action, while taking advantage of the support and expertise of the United Nations in that area.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Ms. Bird (Australia): At the outset, Australia joins others in strongly condemning the horrific bombing in Kabul on 31 May — a shocking attack to take place

during the holy month of Ramadan. In a letter of condolence to President Ghani Ahmadzai and in his remarks to the Australian Parliament, Prime Minister Turnbull restated Australia's commitment to supporting Afghanistan in its fight against terrorism and its long-term security and development.

Attacks like those only strengthen our resolve to stand with the Afghan people to achieve peace and prosperity. We stand with the National Unity Government as it pursues unity and stability for Afghanistan's future. We urge the people of Afghanistan to maintain solidarity despite their frustration and suffering, and commend the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan in encouraging political dialogue through the use of its good offices in Kabul.

The events of the last quarter underline the ongoing need for the international community as a whole to stand with Afghanistan as it works to end the cycle of violence. To that end, Australia recently announced an increase to its military commitment in Afghanistan to approximately 300 personnel so as to support the development of the long-term capabilities of Afghanistan's security forces. That important work is part of our broader commitment to Afghanistan's governance and reform agenda, because securing a future for Afghanistan is not just about security.

We commend Afghanistan's commitment to implementing reform and note the important progress achieved, including improved projections for economic growth this year. The revised penal code and anti-corruption initiatives are commendable achievements in connection with governance and the rule of law. Positive steps on human rights, particularly withdrawing the reservation to the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment are also welcome. To build on that progress, we urge sustained momentum on electoral reform as a critical building block for democratic progress. We were encouraged to hear here today that an announcement on a date for delayed parliamentary elections may be imminent.

We also congratulate Afghanistan on inaugurating the Kabul process initiative. Afghanistan's ownership of the regional discussion about sustainable peace demonstrates a commitment to seek fresh, smart and practical ideas on how stability can be achieved. We encourage Afghanistan's neighbours and partners to join with the National Unity Government in that effort. We welcome the recent constructive engagement between Prime Minister Sharif and President Ghani Ahmadzai. The international community stands with Afghanistan and is ready to support Kabul as it leads on finding solutions to Afghanistan's challenges.

In conclusion, Afghanistan remains at the forefront of global counter-terrorism efforts. Recent events in London, Manchester, Tehran, Egypt and Afghanistan itself serve to underline the potential consequences of failure. Afghanistan remains an urgent priority for regional and international security, and it remains essential that we act together in support.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Ms. Boucher (Canada): I thank you, Sir, for this opportunity to address the Security Council. I would also like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his insightful briefing.

I would like to begin by offering my sincere condolences to the Government and the people of Afghanistan affected by ongoing terrorist attacks, including the bombing in Kabul on 31 May. It is crucial for us to continue our efforts to counter terrorism and all forms of violent extremism.

I would also like to congratulate the Afghan Government on convening the Kabul process for peace and security cooperation conference on 6 June, despite extremely challenging circumstances. Canada fully supports an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. It is my hope that the Kabul process will bear fruit and that Afghanistan will soon be free of such violence.

Canada remains committed to supporting Afghanistan on its path towards development. In line with our recently announced feminist international assistance policy, we will continue to focus on women's and girls' rights in all of our programming in Afghanistan. For example, we actively support women's inclusion and empowerment in Afghanistan. We provide assistance to help implement the law on the elimination of violence against women and offer programmes that provide education, awareness-raising and capacity-building on women's rights and gender-based violence. Our partners also help women assume greater decision-making roles in their households

and communities and build their livelihood skills and capacities. For peace, security and development to take root and endure in Afghanistan, women must join men at the centre of decision-making at all levels in Afghan politics, society and the economy.

Canada commends the Afghan Government for pledging to increase the presence of women in Government institutions to 30 per cent by 2020. Canada also commends the Afghan Government for launching its national action plan to eliminate early and child marriages. On 15 May, Canada joined women from across Afghanistan who gathered to discuss their experiences, vision and contributions to peace at the fourth Kabul Symposium, held on the theme "Afghan Women: Messengers of Peace". Women's participation in the peace and reconciliation process is essential. I hope that events such as that, along with efforts to alleviate gender-based violence and provide more education to girls and young women, will push Afghanistan closer to peace and stability.

(*spoke in French*)

Allow me to express my deep concern about the continuing deterioration of the security situation in Afghanistan, in particular with regard to the number of casualties among civilian and aid workers reported thus far for 2017. We are troubled by the number civilian casualties. Their displacement, increased vulnerability and losses are unacceptable. We are dismayed by the impact of instability and insecurity on women and children. All parties to the conflict must take urgent steps to end the killing and wounding of civilians. We call on Afghanistan's neighbours and partners to continue to work with the Government of Afghanistan to increase regional stability and decrease violence within the country.

Canada supports the Afghan people in their efforts to ensure a more secure, prosperous and peaceful future.

The meeting rose at 1.35 p.m.